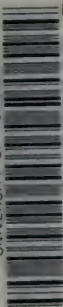


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HOW WILL FREE TRADE IN CORN
AFFECT THE FARMER?

BY

RICHARD GRIFFITHS WELFORD, ESQ.,

Member of the Royal Agricultural Society of England.

Price Five Shillings.

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HOW WILL FREE TRADE
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BEING
AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS
OF
CORN LAWS UPON BRITISH AGRICULTURE.

BY
RICHARD GRIFFITHS WELFORD, ESQ.,

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY OF ENGLAND.

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P R E F A C E.

It is not now necessary to preface such an inquiry, as that I propose to institute into the operation of the Corn Laws on Agriculture, by any preliminary dissertation on the principles of free trade. Since 1820, when the merchants of London presented by their organ, Mr. Alexander Baring (now Lord Ashburton), their memorable petition in favour of free trade, those principles have, with more or less of timidity and reservation, been acted upon by every successive administration. The late ministry, that of Lord Melbourne, in the last days of its political existence, gave in its unqualified adhesion to the doctrines of free trade; and the same doctrines have been subsequently propounded, with great distinctness and ability, by Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Gladstone, as the general rule which must henceforth regulate our commercial legislation.

Such, then, being the rule, the advocates of the corn laws must make out special and peculiar grounds for excepting corn from the ordinary law : whether they have established such grounds is one of the objects of the following pages to inquire.

I also propose to inquire, whether the owners or occupiers of land have really obtained the advantages they expected from a system of restriction, confessedly injurious to all other classes of the community.

The conclusion, in favour of an entirely free trade in corn, at which I have arrived, is the result of no bias towards commercial as distinguished from agricultural occupations, for early training and present tastes lead me altogether to sympathise with agricultural pursuits. Neither have my opportunities of observation been scanty ; first, in the office of my father, who as a country attorney was also extensively employed as a land-agent ; and subsequently, during several years of experience acquired by my own practice in the same professions, previously to my being called to the bar, I have seen the effects of some of the great fluctuations of price upon the interests of both laudlords and farmers.

Hence, many years ago, I became firmly con-

vinced of the injurious operation of the corn laws ; and amongst the numerous landowners and agriculturists, whom business connections, family ties, and personal intimacies, rendered for several years almost exclusively my associates, I never hesitated to avow and defend my opinions in favour of free trade, or to point out the absurdities and the wrongs occasioned by the corn laws. I have thus been constantly subject to that sort of authoritative refutation, which practical farmers once thought so conclusive, and that by arguments and calculations very similar to those in favour of restriction, which are profusely scattered through the evidence offered to the various committees on agricultural distress, and which I have now attempted to sift. These arguments may be all resolved into statements of isolated facts, only accurate under the actually existing circumstances ; or, into an assumed necessity for continuing a system, which had grown out of the extraordinary period of the late war, after things had reverted to a more natural condition. This naturally led to a close scrutiny of one's own views, and a strict examination of the facts and circumstances so confidently urged to prove them untenable. In every case the efficacy of corn laws to secure high prices was

assumed to be incontestible, while the most ridiculous exaggerations of the cheapness and abundance of corn in the north of Europe were treated as incapable of disproof. For the *bread-eaters* there was then little pretence of sympathy.

At present, also, I have, as a practical farmer, a direct and lively interest in the prosperity of English agriculture. Therefore, although study and observation, resulting from a practical acquaintance of some years standing with the management of landed property, and with the ordinary relations of landlord and tenant, have convinced me of the impolicy of *all* restrictions on the trade in foreign corn, and of the absolute futility of all the arguments, by which the advocates of the corn laws have endeavoured to justify those restrictions, I cannot be suspected of entering upon the present examination with any bias adverse to the agricultural interest.

R. G. W.

Northaw, Herts, March, 1843.

HOW WILL FREE TRADE IN CORN AFFECT THE FARMER ?

SECTION I.

AGRICULTURE AND THE CORN TRADE, PREVIOUS TO 1814.

ALTHOUGH the present corn laws originated in 1814, and their merits or demerits must be tried solely with reference to the state of things which has existed since that period, the opinions and circumstances, which led to such a system of restriction, will be but imperfectly understood without a brief retrospect of the state of agriculture and the corn trade in the preceding century.

From the commencement of the eighteenth century to about the year 1765 there had been in this country an almost uninterrupted succession of abundant seasons, and thus the prices of corn and provisions were low, whilst the trade of the nation was progressively increasing. The average price of wheat, from 1701 up to 1766, has been estimated at 32*s.* 1*d.*, which is lower, by some sixteen per cent., than the average price of the preceding century. The population, during that time, steadily increased ; the number of inhabitants in England and Wales having advanced from 5,475,000 in 1700, to upwards of six millions in 1740, and 6,737,000

in 1760. In 1770 the population was 7,428,000. And not only had the English population increased in numbers during the first sixty-six years of the eighteenth century, but the material prosperity of the mass of the nation had increased in even a greater ratio. Adam Smith, in his "Wealth of Nations," which was published in 1776, says, referring to this period, "the most decisive mark of prosperity of any country is the increase of the number of its inhabitants *," but adds, that in "Great Britain, and most other European countries, they are not supposed to double in less than five hundred years." The same writer states, that the real recompense of labour—the real quantities of the necessaries and conveniences of life given to the labourer—had increased considerably during the eighteenth century. And another writer on Political Economy, the late Mr. Malthus, observed, that "during the last forty years of the seventeenth century, and the first twenty of the eighteenth, the average price of corn was such as, compared with the wages of labour, would enable the labourer to purchase with a day's earnings two-thirds of a peck of wheat. From 1720 to 1750 the price of wheat had so fallen, while wages had risen, that instead of two-thirds, the labourer could purchase the whole of a peck of wheat with a day's labour." These advanced wages led to a marked improvement of the quality of the food consumed by the labouring classes, "and a decided elevation in the standard of their comforts and conve-

* To the reader, who recollects the coincidence of a rapid increase of population in Ireland with the most appalling poverty, it will naturally occur that this remark must be taken with some qualification.

“niences.” Although cultivation was greatly extended during this period, as is proved by the increased number of inclosure bills — being 16 only in the reign of George I, 226 in that of George II, and advancing to 734 in the first fifteen years of the reign of George III, *viz.* from 1760 to 1775—but little rise in the value of landed property, similar to that which has been observed during the last fifty years, had then occurred. The mercantile classes were gradually acquiring wealth, and those accumulations of capital, which soon afterwards gave such an impetus to trading enterprise and so greatly increased the value of land, were silently going on. Arthur Young, alluding to the value of landed property in 1770, says, “a neighbour of mine in Suffolk, who inherited a considerable landed property, informed me, that, in various conversations he had between 1770 and 1780 with a relation far advanced in years, much surprise was expressed at the rise of rents which then began to take place. Through the long period of his relation’s experience no rise was ever thought of; and lease after lease in long succession was signed, without a word passing on the question of rent: that was an object considered fixed; and grandfather, father, and son succeeded without a thought of any rise: in many cases landlords were much more apprehensive of losing a tenant at the old rent, than having the smallest conception of raising it to a new one*.”

The agriculture of Scotland, which was much behind that of England, began, about the same period, to feel the vivifying influence which commercial wealth

* Inquiry into the Progressive Value of Money, p. 102.

imparts to a nation. The following extract, descriptive of Scotch agriculture at this time, is taken from an Essay*, which obtained the "Highland Society's" prize a few years ago.

"Agriculture in Scotland, as having been at this time much farther behind, partook even to a greater degree of this improvement; and it is between 1765 and 1775, that we trace the opening of a better system, which had begun to be introduced at the commencement of this epoch. Still, however, husbandry, as generally practised in Scotland, continued in a comparatively rude state; and, notwithstanding the very laudable exertions of many patriotic landed proprietors in various parts of the country, to introduce, by example, a better order of things, no great progress appears to have been made—excepting in some favoured districts—in exciting the tenantry to depart from the long-trodden path pursued by them. It would appear, at this period, a great proportion of the arable land in Scotland was still very partially enclosed, so that even contiguous farms under tillage were not separated by any distinct fence. The antient practice almost universally prevailed—excepting in the neighbourhood of towns, and in those favoured districts alluded to—of occupying farms as "*In-field*" and "*Out-field*," as it was called. By this mode of management, the land near the stead-ing, or farm-offices, received all the manure collected and prepared there, and thus an attempt was made to keep those lands for many successive years under a corn-crop consisting of wheat, or more commonly of oats, beans or barley, and peas; and, although an occasional imperfect fallowing was introduced at the close of each rotation of six or eight years, the constant succession of corn-crops kept the soil in a continually impoverished condition. The out-field land, which formed the bulk of the possession, was made to grow a succession of oat-crops, generally three, until, exhausted in strength and overrun with weeds, it was suffered, under the dominion of this new possessor—and without any attempt being made to assist the herbage by the introduction of seeds—to rest, until the caprice of the occupier should deem it prepared to undergo the renewed attempt to produce another series of scanty crops. The only manure ap-

* Account of Improvements in the Agriculture of Scotland, by Mr. John Dudgeon, of Skylaw, near Kelso—republished in the first vol. of the Journal of the English Agricultural Society (1839).

plied to this division of the farm was effected by occasionally folding the few live stock then kept upon detached portions of it; after which, in this case, it was expected to yield four or five corn-crops in place of three. Very little wheat was at this time grown in Scotland, and, even upon soils adapted for the successful culture of this grain, the short-sighted cupidity of many landlords prevented its more extensive cultivation, as being of an exhausting nature to the soil. The drill system of husbandry, especially during the early part of this period, was little practised in any part of Scotland, and the culture of turnips in this form, which at this time had its origin in this part of the island, entered only partially into the rotation of a few of the best farms. Potatoes were then only beginning to be cultivated in the fields, and the introduction of grass-seeds had not made any extensive progress beyond the *in-fields* of the best districts. Improvements, however, made very rapid progress towards the close of the period under consideration; and the system of leases having come more extensively into use—since the restrictions in entails affecting their extent was abolished by the act of 1770—encouragement was afforded to tenants to expend more liberally, and to embark further in a species of speculation, which now gave promise of considerable success. Hence, we find rents rose very considerably about this time, and many proprietors, who had expended largely in the improvements lately introduced, found themselves amply remunerated by an increase of rent, in some cases to nearly treble their value twenty years before.”

Many passages are also found in the histories of this period, indicating the activity of British commerce, which has been since so prodigiously developed. Smollett mentions, that in 1750, “the subjects “of his Britannic majesty imported more iron and “steel than all the other countries in Europe;” and the contradictory petitions for and against the measure then passed for admitting American iron into the United Kingdom, prove, incidentally, the extent and importance to which the smelting of iron and manufactures in metal had attained. Every session of Parliament now began to be occupied with bills for the improvement or protection of some branch of

commerce, which, absurd and unsound in principle as some of them were, plainly demonstrated the transition of the nation from the condition of an agricultural to that of a commercial people. Bounties were profusely given to favoured trades, whilst more rational means of encouragement to the silk and cotton manufactures were adopted, in the reduction of the duties on China and Persian raw silk, and the absolute exemption from all duty of cotton and silk, the produce of Georgia and Carolina. Indeed, during the thirty years of abundance which preceded 1750, the nation had been so remarkably aggrandised by her growing manufactures and commerce, as to become an object at once of envy and increased respect to the rest of Europe.

The winter of 1755-6 was remarkable for its severity, and the consequent failure of the following harvest, and a great dearth of provisions. The public voice was loud in denunciation of the "villanous" schemes of forestallers and engrossers," and the legislature was called upon to visit upon the heads of millers and bakers, in the shape of penal laws and stringent regulations, punishment for a scarcity the effect of the seasons. But, as this country then constantly exported grain, the prohibition of exportation, combined with considerable importations of corn, aided more effectually by an abundant harvest in the following year, dissipated for the time such economical chimeras. But it must not be supposed that a legislature then, as now, containing a preponderant landed interest, left a trade in which they were so much concerned as that of corn, unfettered by statutable regulations. A bounty on the exportation of grain (5*s.* a quarter on wheat, and 2*s.* 6*d.* on barley

or malt) was given, although, in ordinary seasons, the produce of the country seems to have afforded, without such a stimulus, an ample surplus beyond the wants of its inhabitants, accompanied by a prohibition of the import of foreign grain. The ten years, however, from 1765 to 1775, seem to have contained many in which the crops were deficient, and the prices of corn tended to a permanently higher range, so much so, that a new era in the history of the corn trade began. From 1765 our consumption of grain was beyond the native growth, and thenceforth, with one or two accidental exceptions, the nation constantly imported in deficient seasons a part of its supply of corn. Up to 1773 permission to import corn had been conceded, under the pressure of scarcity, and for temporary exigencies; but in that year the opponents of a prohibitory corn law succeeded in carrying a fresh act, which allowed importation of wheat at a duty of 6*d.* per quarter, when the price was at or above 48*s.*; and the bounty and exportation were to cease together, when the price was at or above 44*s.* a quarter. From this time to 1792, the average price of wheat in England was about 50*s.* a quarter, rising occasionally, as in 1775, to 59*s.*, and falling again to 43*s.*, and once, in the abundant year of 1779, to 36*s.* per quarter; the corn law, therefore, had but little effect either in preventing importation in bad seasons, or promoting exportation in good ones. In 1791, the landed interest, not satisfied with the advantages secured to the owners of the soil by the act of 1773, procured a law preventing importation, except when wheat in our markets should reach or exceed the price of 54*s.* a quarter, while the bounty on exporta-

tion, when the price fell to 44s., was still continued. The duty and bounty on other grain bore the usual proportion to wheat.

It has been shown most conclusively by Mr. Tooke, in his masterly work, the "History of Prices," that, though the vast development of our manufacturing and commercial industry enabled the people of Great Britain to consume, at prices so much enhanced, the greatly increased quantities of corn which they required in the latter half of the eighteenth century, yet that the rise in prices of produce was mainly the effect of a series of irregular seasons and the frequent recurrence of defective crops. Every examination into the details of seasons, either of scarcity or great abundance, serves to show, that prices have always varied in a ratio much beyond the utmost computation of differences of quantity in the crops of grain. This fully accounts for the fact, that periods of partial deficiency have generally produced temporary agricultural prosperity; while, on the other hand, every occasion of transition from dearth to abundance has been marked by complaints of agricultural distress*.

This tendency of prices to rise beyond the degree of the deficiency — especially in the case of corn — must be kept constantly in view when considering the events which occurred in this country between 1792 and 1814, and the extraordinary prosperity enjoyed by the farmers and landlords during that pe-

* To those who require a full elucidation of the effect of the variations in seasons upon prices, I recommend Mr. Tooke's *History of Prices*, above referred to, where the subject is treated with a fulness of detail and closeness of argument, which leave no room for questioning the positions of the author.

riod. It is from omitting this primary and obvious cause for the extravagant prices to which agricultural produce attained during the war, when foreign supplies were obstructed, that so many persons seek for explanations of the phenomenon amongst the other circumstances of the times, which only contributed to those high prices in a subordinate and secondary degree. War demand, and the profuse government expenditure in one year of large sums raised by loans, furnish, with many respectable reasoners, the solution of all difficulties ; but a little consideration will satisfy us, that although the demand of the government for warlike stores and munitions may attract more attention than the ordinary and steady demands of commerce, yet that all the industry and all the capital attracted to the trades which supply the war demand must have been drawn from other, and probably far more productive employment ; and the men, who as soldiers and sailors, were diverted from the peaceful occupations of commerce, manufactures, or agriculture, consumed but little more of agricultural produce than they would have done had they remained engaged in creating wealth instead of being occupied in the destruction of their fellow-men. Upon this subject of war-demand, Mr. Tooke remarks, that “ the fallacy of the doctrine, “ which represents a general elevation of prices, both of “ commodities and labour, to be a necessary consequence “ of a state of war, proceeds (and cannot otherwise than “ so proceed) on the supposition that the money expended by the government consists of funds distinct “ from, and over and above any that before existed ; “ whereas it is perfectly demonstrable, that an expenditure by government, whether defrayed by immediate

“taxes to the whole amount, or by loan on the anticipation of taxes to be levied, is *nothing but a change in laying out the same sum of money*; and that what is expended by government would and must have been laid out by individuals upon objects of consumption, productive or unproductive.” Those who attribute the high prices of corn during the late war, to what is called war-demand, overlook the historical fact, that in the previous century war and a large government expenditure, defrayed by loans, existed at several periods, during which the prices of grain were considerably lower than in previous and subsequent periods of profound peace. Amongst the numerous evils of war the increased consumption and waste of food is often overrated, but the way in which war acts upon the prices of such commodities is plainly by obstructing or diminishing supply. From the following state of the Windsor prices of wheat, kept at Eton College, it will be evident, that in the case of the agricultural produce of this country, there was, for upwards of a hundred years previous to 1793, as low a range of prices during the periods of war as during intervals of peace:—

			£.	s.	d.
1688	to	1697	10 years of war	2	2 6 $\frac{3}{4}$
1698	...	1701	4 years of peace	2	6 0
1702	...	1712	11 years of war	2	2 0
1713	...	1739	27 years of peace	1	15 10 $\frac{3}{4}$
1740	...	1748	9 years of war	1	11 6 $\frac{1}{2}$
1749	...	1754	6 years of peace	1	13 11 $\frac{1}{2}$
1755	..	1762	8 years of war	1	17 1 $\frac{3}{4}$
1763	...	1774	12 years of peace	2	8 11 $\frac{1}{2}$
1775	...	1782	8 years of war	2	6 6 $\frac{1}{2}$
1783	...	1792	10 years of peace	2	10 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ *

* Tooke's History of Prices, vol. i, p. 97.

That the late war, from its extent, and in the latter part of it from its very anti-commercial character, operated most seriously upon the prices of corn in this country by obstructing all foreign importation during a period when, from the frequent recurrence of deficient crops, coincided with a constant increase of population, and rapid improvement of our manufactures, such an extraneous supply was required, will be presently made plain enough. Again, a small band of very pertinacious theorists insist that the high prices of corn, and all the agricultural prosperity of the war, arose from a depreciated currency; but the fallacy of their reasoning has been so frequently shown, and their nostrum so completely rejected by the good sense of the nation, that it would be a mere waste of time to bestow much space upon the doctrines of the "Currency doctors." That the depreciation of the currency during the war formed an addition to the many evils the people endured from a long protracted state of aggravated hostilities cannot be denied, but so far as that depreciation—a depreciation distinctly marked by the difference between the value of paper money and gold coin—affected prices, it was to produce a general rise of prices; whereas the gains then made by the agriculturists and the landowners arose from the enhancement of their peculiar commodities in a proportion far beyond the general rise of prices.

In 1792, at the commencement of the French war, the nation had fully recovered from the depression consequent upon the American war of Independence, and was beginning to reap the fruits of the grand inventions in science and art as applicable to manufactures and the rapid progress of our cotton manufactures, in the steady

increase of population, and no less steady improvement in the condition of all classes of the people. The population of England and Wales had increased from 7,953,000, in 1780, to 8,675,000 in 1790, whilst every branch of trade and agriculture was advancing with a steady progression. The writer of the Essay upon the Agriculture of Scotland, to which I have before referred, commenting upon the period from 1783 to 1795, observes, “ Besides the unprecedented increase of population which took place at this time, and which created “ a great additional demand for the ordinary descriptions “ of food, the improved habits of the people at large, and “ a more full and substantial mode of living, gave rise “ to a much more extended use of wheaten bread and “ butchers’ meat: the increased luxury of the higher “ classes, in servants and horses, also operated as a “ new demand ; and new markets so near home being “ established in the increasing towns and villages “ throughout the country, imparted a spirit to the “ energies of the farmer, which were principally applied to the further reclaiming of those lands which “ had not hitherto been under the influence of the “ plough.” So much had rents advanced, that it has been calculated that the total rental of Scotland, which, at the close of the American war, in 1783, did not amount to more than £. 1,500,000, in 1795 exceeded £. 2,000,000. And the advance of agriculture and rise in rents was even more conspicuous in England at the same epoch.

The harvest of 1792 was wet, and much grain injured : the following spring was a very dry one, and although the crops of wheat proved moderate, the Lent corn was generally deficient. In 1794 a very

hot and dry summer produced a crop of wheat scanty in amount of produce though of good quality, while the spring corn and leguminous crops were so parched in many parts of England as "scarcely to have re-
 "turned the seed committed to the ground for them." The winter of 1794-5 set in early, and proved to be so inclement and severe, that injury to the growing crops was much apprehended. This, in addition to the increased consumption which always occurs in severe winters, excited very general alarm. Wheat rose from 55*s.* 7*d.* a quarter, on the 1st of January, 1795, to 77*s.* 2*d.*, on the first of July in the same year. Government had adopted extraordinary measures of precaution to meet the expected dearth, by the seizure of all neutral ships bound with corn to France, and the employment of agents to buy corn in the Baltic ports. But the scarcity of corn was at least as great on the continent of Europe, as well as in America, as with us, and the competition of the French government in the corn markets of Europe raised prices so much, that the quantity of wheat imported in the whole of the year 1795 did not quite reach three hundred thousand quarters. Under such threatening circumstances the average price of wheat in this country reached in the month of August the enormous height of 108*s.* 4*d.* a quarter. In the latter part of August the weather cleared, and the harvest proved fine, so that by October the average price of wheat had fallen again to 76*s.* 9*d.* the quarter.

It was in November, 1795, that Mr. Burke wrote his letter, entitled "Thoughts and Details on Scarcity," wherein he says, "It must be remembered, that this

“ year of produce (the year 1794), short, but excellent,
 “ followed a year, 1793, which was not extraordinary
 “ in production, nor of a superior quality, and left but
 “ little in store. At first this was not felt, because the
 “ harvest came in unusually early—earlier than com-
 “ mon by a full month. The winter at the end of 1794
 “ and 1795 was more than usually unfavourable both to
 “ corn and grass, owing to the sudden relaxation of very
 “ rigorous frosts, followed by rains, which were again
 “ rapidly succeeded by frosts of still greater rigour than
 “ the first. Much wheat was utterly destroyed. The
 “ clover grass suffered in many places. What I never
 “ observed before, the rye grass or coarsebent, suffered
 “ more than the clover. Even the meadow grass in
 “ some places was killed to the very root.” In the
 spring the crops partially recovered, but were subse-
 quently much blighted and injured by the effects of cold
 East winds at the time of blooming. Mr. Burke then
 proceeds to say, “ On thrashing, I found things as
 “ I expected—the ears not filled, some of the cap-
 “ sules quite empty, and several others containing only
 “ withered hungry grain, inferior to the appearance of
 “ rye. My best ears and grains were not fine; never
 “ had I grain of so low a quality, yet I sold one load
 “ for 21*l*. Since then the price has risen, and I have
 “ sold two loads of the same sort for 23*l*.” But not
 only was wheat and other corn thus dear, but meat and
 dairy produce rose equally in price from the scarcity
 of fodder; for instance, Mr. Burke says, “The store-
 “ swine, from the failure of subsistence last year, are
 “ now at an extravagant price. Pigs, at our fairs have
 “ sold lately for fifty shillings, which two years ago

“ would not have brought more than twenty.” “ In many places a full fourth of the sheep or lambs were lost; and what remained of the lambs were poor and ill-fed, the ewes having no milk.” This last loss arose from the failure of the turnip crop of 1794. As usual there was a cry raised against the “ monopoly of farms,” “ forestalling,” and “ regrating,” and a general disposition existed to account for the high price of provisions by any but the true and simple cause, the visitation of two unproductive seasons. Lord Kenyon, in charging the Grand Jury at the Shropshire assizes, talked of “ a report that a set of individuals are plundering at the expense of public happiness, by endeavouring, in this county, in this most abundant county, to purchase the grain now growing upon the soil. For the sake of common humanity I trust this is untrue. Gentlemen, ’tis your duty as justices to see justice done to the county;” and much more to the same effect. All this is sufficiently ridiculous, but it shows the serious apprehensions of scarcity which were then generally entertained.

Now began that interference with the wages of agricultural labour, which afterwards expanded into the allowance system, and has inflicted so much mischief upon English husbandry and so many miseries upon the English peasant. It is due to the manly sense of Mr. Burke to mention the protest he made, in the work from which I have before quoted, against the unsound principle of interfering between employer and employed.

“ It is not true,” says Mr. Burke, “ that the rate of wages

has not increased with the nominal price of provisions. I allow that it has not fluctuated with the price, nor ought it, and the squires of Norfolk had dined when they gave it as their opinion, that it might or ought to rise and fall with the market of provisions. The rate of wages in truth has no *direct* relation to that price. Labour is a commodity like every other, and rises or falls according to the demand. Wages have been twice raised in my time, and they bear a full proportion — on corn a greater than formerly — to the medium of provision during the last bad cycle of twenty years."

After showing that all above what the interest of employer would induce him to give is a *tax*, and, if left to the will of another, an *arbitrary tax*, he says,

"The tax proposed on the farming interest of this kingdom, is to be levied at what is called the discretion of the justices of the peace."

And, in allusion to the same subject, he incidentally gives the following picture of what had up to that time been the ordinary condition of farmers.

"It is a perilous thing to try experiments with the farmer. The farmer's capital (except in a very few persons, and in a very few places) is far more feeble than is commonly imagined. The trade is a very poor trade, and subject to great risks and losses. The capital, such as it is, is turned but once in the year; in some branches it requires three years before the money is paid. A greater or more ruinous mistake cannot be fallen into, than that the trades of agriculture and grazing can be conducted upon any other than the common principles of commerce; namely, that the producer should be permitted, and even expected, to look for all possible profit, which, without fraud or violence, he can make; to turn plenty or scarcity to the best advantage he can; to keep back or bring forward his commodities at his pleasure; to account to no one for his stock or his gains. It is very rarely that the most prosperous farmer, counting the value of his quick and dead stock, the interest of the money he turns, together with his own wages as bailiff or overseer, ever does make twelve or fifteen per cent. by the year of his capital. I speak of the prosperous. In most parts of England I have rarely known a farmer, who to his own trade has not added some other employment or traffic, that, after a course of most unremitting parsimony and labours (such for the greater part is theirs), and persevering in his business for a long course of years, died worth more

than paid his debts, leaving his posterity to continue in nearly the same equal conflict between industry and want, in which his last predecessor, and long line of predecessors before him, lived and died."

Some advance was however made in wages, but it was far from being adequate (even with the allowance) to meet the increased price of the necessaries of life.

The war was then very generally thought to have had great influence in the rise of prices, and, inasmuch as military operations of the French and other continental nations interfered with the supply of foreign grain, which but for the war would have prevented such an unprecedented advance in the cost of provisions in this country, that opinion was in a sense correct. Some measure, both of the extent of the deficiency and of the public apprehension of the danger of dearth, may be found in the statement of Lord Sheffield in the House of Commons in December, 1795, who said the crops were deficient from one-seventh to one-third, that there was no old stock, and no prospect of any adequate supply from abroad; and in the remedies proposed and adopted to encourage importation. A bounty on importation, varying from 16*s.* to 20*s.* a quarter according to the quality was granted on wheat, and 6*s.* per cwt. on flour, from the south of Europe, till the quantity should amount to four hundred thousand quarters; and from America, till it should amount to five hundred thousand quarters; and one of 12*s.* to 15*s.* from any other part of Europe, till it should amount to five hundred thousand quarters; and from 8*s.* to 10*s.* after it exceeded that quantity. These bounties were to continue till the 30th of September, 1796. Members of the two Houses of Parliament bound themselves to reduce the consumption of bread in their own households by one-third, and to promote such a reduc-

tion wheresoever their influence extended. Then was the absurd fashion of wearing hair-powder put down, by a tax imposed with a view to prevent such an unprofitable application of wheat flour.

The dearness of food produced many riots and disturbances amongst the agricultural population, and the distress of the working classes in general was most severe. The privations endured by all persons who depended upon limited money incomes, and by those a little above the working classes, were also extreme. In the spring of 1796, the average price of wheat again reached 100*s.* a quarter. That in such a state of things the fears of the public should have exaggerated the dangers of the times — great as they were — requires little proof; and the effect of the stimulus afforded by such prices upon the owners and occupiers of land in promoting the extension of tillage and the application of capital to land, is matter of history. From this period of actual or anticipated famine, this time of suffering to the bulk of the community, is dated the great prosperity of the landed interest. Farmers, who had leases, realised enormous profits; and landlords, whose farms were not under lease, obtained on every new letting increases of rent hitherto unparalleled. The following extract, from an article by Arthur Young, in the *Annals of Agriculture* for 1796, affords a practical illustration of the effect of a deficiency in advancing prices in a ratio beyond the amount of the defect, which was the great source of profit to the farmers of that day.

“ The average price of wheat for the twelve months, from May, 1795, to April, 1796, has been, on an average, in England and Wales, 10*s.* 7*d.* per bushel, and that of barley 4*s.* 9*d.* Now, the

price for twelve years ending 1794, was for wheat 5*s.* 10*d.* and for barley 3*s.* 3*d.* For the year above described, therefore, the price has exceeded that average 4*s.* 9*d.* per bushel for wheat, and 1*s.* 6*d.* for barley. Let us suppose the annual consumption of wheat to be 8,701,875 quarters, and that of barley 10,545,000 quarters, and further, that the deficiency of the crop, on the average of the two years, so far as they affect the period in question, has amounted, in wheat, to one-fifth; and that the barley has, on an average of the two crops, been a medium: in this case there would have been consumed

Of wheat 6,961,500 qrs., the extra price on which,	£.
at 4 <i>s.</i> 9 <i>d.</i> the bushel, or 38 <i>s.</i> the quarter, is	13,226,840
Of barley 10,545,000 qrs., at 1 <i>s.</i> 6 <i>d.</i> per bushel, or	
12 <i>s.</i> a quarter.	6,327,000
	<hr/>
	£.19,553,849

“ If, therefore, these data are just, and they are ventured merely as calculation on uncertain foundations, the farmers have received in these two articles only, near 20,000,000 sterling beyond the deficiency of the crop, supposing the deficiency to be one-fifth, which is a very great one, and without adding a word on the price of meat or any other article.”—Vol. xxvi, p. 469.

Here we see, that a far larger sum was distributed among the growers of corn than could be derived from medium or abundant crops; a profit derived through the alarm and distress of the times at the expense of the rest of the community.

The harvest of 1796 was abundant and well secured, which, combined with the importation of eight hundred thousand quarters of wheat, under the influence of the bounties I have mentioned, gradually reduced its price, until in December, 1796, the average was 57*s.* 3*d.* the quarter. The fall continued until the summer of the following year, when the price varied between 49*s.* and 50*s.* a quarter. The harvest of 1797 was wet and stormy, and the price of wheat advanced to 60*s.* in October of that year, receding again after the harvest of 1798, which was moderately productive,

to 48*s.* in the month of November. In January of 1799 the average price of wheat was 49*s.* 6*d.*, which is as low as the average of several years previous to 1793. The autumn of 1798 had been wet and unfavourable for wheat sowing, and the succeeding winter was long and rigorous, much snow fell late in the spring, and the season was altogether untoward; the crops having an unpromising appearance the average price of wheat rose, in May, 1799, to 61*s.* 8*d.*, all other agricultural productions rising in the same proportion. The summer and autumn were wet, and the crops were much injured, so that at the close of the year the price of wheat was 94*s.* 2*d.* a quarter.

In the beginning of 1800, the deficiency of grain again engaged the attention of Parliament, when the defect of the late crop was estimated at one-third, and the high prices then current in the corn growing countries of the Continent were alluded to as an obstacle to a foreign supply. Again were various devices for limiting the consumption of grain resorted to, and bounties offered on importation. No great importation however took place, and the unfavourable appearance of the crops of 1800 caused the average price of wheat to rise in June to 134*s.* 5*d.* per quarter, whilst barley was 69*s.* 1*d.*, and oats 51*s.* 1*d.* Butchers' meat was also very high. With what unction have I heard some of my friends, who were farmers in that day, refer to these prices, and talk of the "glorious times for farmers," apparently forgetting that there were others of the community, not farmers, to whom "these glorious times" were seasons of unmitigated suffering.

The summer of 1800, up to the third week of August, was hot and dry, and a considerable quantity of corn in the earlier districts was well got in: some importation

was also taking place ; and the markets for wheat suddenly declined, in August, to 96*s.* 2*d.* a quarter. On the 19th of August, however, incessant rains set in, and a large proportion of the wheat crop being still in the field was sprouted and much injured. In Scotland the crops suffered more than in England ; and no less than 1,242,507 quarters of foreign corn were imported, yet notwithstanding that supply the average rose, in December, 1800, to 133*s.* a quarter. The events of the war were at this time peculiarly adverse to the procuring a foreign supply : Russia, under French influence, had laid an embargo on British shipping ; Denmark was hostile, and Prussia had in the previous July imposed a duty of 10*s.* a quarter on the exportation of wheat, a measure aimed expressly at this country. In the following season, as had been foreseen, the Baltic was entirely closed against us. Dearth produced its usual consequences of tumult and riotous proceedings, and it is alleged that the peace of the metropolis was with difficulty preserved. Prices continued to rise until March, 1801, when the average of wheat was 156*s.* 2*d.* per quarter !! Nearly all other articles of European raw produce advanced simultaneously, partly in consequence of the inclemency of the seasons, and partly from the extraordinary obstacles to importation caused by the war. The increased weight of taxation, also, on all necessaries, such as salt, soap, candles, leather, malt, beer, sugar, tea, tobacco, and spirits, had rendered all such articles of consumption inordinately dear.

None suffered more from this dearth than the working classes ; the very lowest class of labourers could with difficulty obtain the means requisite to sustain

themselves and their families, whilst, notwithstanding a rise of wages in most branches of industry, the classes above the lowest, and many skilled workmen, could do little more than provide themselves with the barest food, clothing, and shelter. Statements were at this time put forth, amongst other classes of artizans, by the journeymen tailors and the printers' compositors, from the former of which it appeared that their wages from 1777 to 1795 had been 1*l.* 1*s.* 9*d.* per week, which, at the then average price of 7½*d.* for the quarter loaf, would purchase 36 loaves, while the utmost advance of wages they had obtained was, in 1795, to 25*s.*, and, in 1801, to 27*s.* per week, which would purchase only 18½ loaves in the last named year. The compositors, whose wages had advanced from 24*s.* to 27*s.* in 1795, and to 30*s.* in 1801, showed an equal disproportion between the advances of wages and the increased prices of necessaries. Nor were the agricultural labourers better off, though in some districts a considerable increase of wages, or rather, of wages and parish allowance together, had been conceded. Arthur Young, in his *Annals of Agriculture* for 1801*, says, that "a person now living in the vicinity of Bury, Suffolk, " who, when he laboured for 5*s.* a week, could purchase " with that sum a bushel of wheat, a bushel of malt, a " pound of butter, a pound of cheese, and a pennyworth " of tobacco; while the same articles, in 1801, cost " 1*l.* 6*s.* 9*d.*; and, supposing his wages in the last " named year to be 9*s.*, and his parish allowance from " the rates 6*s.* a week, making together 15*s.*, it would " require 1*l.* 5*d.* more than his wages and allowance

* P. 265.

“ together to purchase the same quantities of consum-
 “ able commodities he procured when his wages were
 “ 5s. a week.” The following comparative estimate of
 prices of necessaries at four different periods, by an
 inhabitant of Bury St. Edmonds, is extracted from the
 Appendix to a Report of a Committee of the House of
 Commons in 1800 :—

	1773.			1793.			1799.			1800.			
	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	
Coomb of Malt	0	12	0	1	3	0	1	3	0	2	0	6	1. 9. 0
Chaldron of Coals ...	1	11	6	2	0	6	2	6	0	2	11	0	1. 9. 0
Coomb of Oats	0	5	0	0	13	0	0	16	0	1	1	0	17. 0
Load of Hay	2	2	0	4	10	0	5	5	0	7	0	0	10. 0
Meat	0	0	4	0	0	5	0	0	7	0	0	9	5
Butter	0	0	6	0	0	11	0	0	11	0	1	4	1. 9.
Sugar (Loaf)	0	0	8	0	1	0	0	1	3	0	1	4	
Soap	0	0	6	0	0	8	0	0	9½	0	0	10	
Window Lights (30)	3	10	0	7	10	0	12	12	0	12	12	0	
Candles	0	0	6	0	0	8	0	0	9½	0	0	10½	
Poor Rates, per Qr.	0	1	0	0	2	6	0	3	0	0	5	0	
£.	8	4	0	16	2	8	22	9	4	25	14	1½	

Of this period Mr. Tooke observes, “ But simple
 “ and obvious as were the causes of the great advance
 “ of prices, there were persons who denied, or pro-
 “ fessed to doubt, the existence of scarcity to account
 “ for the high prices, as there have been persons who,
 “ in more recent times, have denied the existence of
 “ abundance as accounting for a fall of prices*.” And
 this time of suffering and dearth formed the great
 epoch of agricultural prosperity. I cannot cite more
 unexceptionable evidence to that effect than the Prize
 Essay of the Highland Society before mentioned,

* History of Prices, vol. i, p. 229.

wherein, having disposed of the period anterior to 1795, the writer says —

“ But we hasten to go on to the next period, as infinitely more marked and conspicuous in the bright career of Scotch agriculture. The epoch from 1795 to 1814 exhibits, indeed, an era unexampled in the history of improvement in any other country. Many favourable circumstances operated to produce this result, and that these events, equally applicable to the sister kingdom, did not produce so striking an effect in England, can be accounted for in part from the circumstance that she previously occupied a more elevated position in the scale of improvement. But the want of leases there, perhaps, more than any other cause, contributed to her having been outstripped in this laudable struggle. Great Britain was now engaged in the heat of the war occasioned by the French revolution; and, without going into the abstract question as to the general effect of war upon prices, there is no doubt that the peculiar character of that contest tended materially to affect the price of agricultural produce, both in this country and throughout Europe. The extensive military operations carried on over a great part of the Continent could not fail to interfere seriously with the productiveness of those countries where such distractions existed; while the obstructions to commercial intercourse enhanced materially the value of our supplies from abroad, which, at one time, indeed, were nearly cut off by the peculiar tactics of the enemy. These causes induced a greater attention to be devoted to agriculture here. But, above all, the great rise in price, chiefly attributable to the frequent recurrence of bad seasons at this time, tended to give an extraordinary impetus to agricultural energy. The average price of wheat, which had been under 50s. per quarter during the twenty years immediately preceding 1795, rose in that year to the average of 81s. 6d., and in the subsequent year, at one time, reached 96s. The price, however, recurred to the average of 54s. in 1798, owing to the favourable seasons of 1796 and 1797; but a series of excessively high prices followed*, which was attended by a great degree of prosperity to all persons engaged in agriculture. No doubt this great rise of price was occasioned chiefly, as we have noticed, by a cause which operated also to lessen considerably the

* Of the twenty years, from 1794 to 1814, the average price of wheat was 89s. 7d.—Eton Tables.

disposable quantity of farm produce ; but it has been demonstrated*, that the effect of a deficient crop is to raise the price of the produce of the land greatly beyond the ratio of the defect, and, consequently, that a larger sum, in ordinary cases, is distributed among the growers, after a year of deficiency, than is derived from medium or abundant crops. Besides, higher prices, from whatever cause, act in enhancing the estimation of the profits of that pursuit from which they are derived. Hence the profits obtained from agriculture came to attract attention, and a liberal application of capital ensued. Those engaged in the cultivation of the soil eagerly sought after information in their profession — more anxiously observed and copied the improvements of their intelligent neighbours — and a praiseworthy spirit of rivalry generally obtained.

“ A combination of so many favourable circumstances soon became evident in the rapidly improved face of the country. The liberal returns from agriculture gave rise to an increased application of capital to the soil, to an extent indeed, in many instances, which, as matters turned out, in the end frustrated the accomplishment of individual reward. A spirit of intelligence prevailed more generally among those engaged in husbandry, and more judicious and correct principles came to be applied in the chief operations of the farm. A further improvement took place in the system of rotations ; clovers were now extensively cultivated ; a great breadth of land which had been managed by an imperfect fallow was applied further to turnips ; and it came to be the universal rule that clover ; or some description of fallow crop, was interposed between every two culmiferous crops. But the order in which cropping was pursued was beginning to be regulated, not so much by any fixed rule of rotation as by the application of correct general principles, varied often according to results.”

The consumption of butchers' meat is also said to have increased, estimated by the numbers of cattle alone, 30 per cent. ; but the increased weight rendered the increase still greater. This is attributed to the better condition and increased luxuries of the people.

“ But what, above all others, is indicative of the astonishing degree of improvement which accrued during this period, is the unprecedented rapidity with which the rent of land got up. There

* Young's Annals of Agriculture for 1796, vol. xxvi, p. 469.

is every reason to believe that the estimate, which states the rise of the arable portion of the land in Scotland to have amounted to considerably upwards of 100 per cent., is nearly correct. We have seen that, in 1795, the rental has been given as amounting to 2,000,000*l*. In 1815, the total rental of Scotland, exclusive of houses, amounted to 5,278,685*l*."

Again let me remind the agricultural reader of the deep shade the privations of the community afforded to this glowing picture. The spring of 1801 was genial; and the preceding winter had been less rigorous than the two former ones; while the death of the emperor Paul, and the peace with Denmark, which followed the battle of Copenhagen, rendered the aspect of political affairs more promising. The Baltic had again become open to British shipping, and all the apprehensions, which the absolute obstruction of supplies from that quarter had caused, were removed. The enormous price of corn had also occasioned a greatly increased breadth of cultivation, which, as the seed time both for wheat and spring corn, had been favourable, improved the prospects of a home supply in the next year. Prices of wheat, under these circumstances, rapidly declined to 129*s*. 8*d*. in June, and to 75*s*. 6*d*. by the end of the year. The importations of wheat in this year amounted to 1,424,766 quarters, and about half that quantity of barley and oats. The harvest proved to be one of moderate abundance.

That temporary cessation of hostilities with France, known as the peace of Amiens, occurred in 1802; and the harvests of that year and of 1803 being of about an average production, the price of wheat went gradually down to 57*s*. 1*d*. a quarter, at the close of the former year; and further declined, notwith-

standing the renewal of the war early in the latter year, to 52*s.* 3*d.* at its end. For the first three months of 1804 prices still subsided, so that the average of wheat for March was 49*s.* 6*d.*, or, as nearly as possible, to the level of 1792. And this occurred, be it remembered, after twelve years of war, and eight years after the suspension of cash payments. This fall in prices too had taken place in the face of the increased cost of production; the wages of labour and the expense of all kinds of implements used in husbandry having, as I have shown, risen from the frequent recurrence of scarcity during the previous twelve years. The government loans, also, had raised the rate of interest, and taxation had become more burthensome. On the other hand, tillage had been greatly extended, and there is no doubt that the native produce of corn was larger, on an average crop, in proportion to the ordinary consumption, than in 1792. The cost of a foreign supply had been increased by the renewal of the war, which had added from 5*s.* to 10*s.* per quarter to the usual rate of freight and insurance of corn. Such a fall of price, however, was not submitted to by the landed interest without an effort for further protection, and petitions to that effect poured in upon Parliament. The committee of the House of Commons, to whom these petitions were referred, appear to have fully understood the causes of the foregoing fluctuations, for they reported that—"It appears to your committee that the price of corn, from 1791 to the harvest of 1803, has been very irregular; but, upon an average, increased in a great degree by the years of scarcity, has, in general, yielded a fair profit to the grower. The casual high prices, however, have had the effect of stimulating industry [appli-

“ cable to agriculture], and bringing into cultivation
 “ large tracts of waste land, which, combined with the
 “ two last productive seasons, and other causes, have
 “ occasioned such a depression in the value of grain,
 “ as, it is feared, *will greatly tend to the discouragement*
 “ *of agriculture, unless maintained by the support of*
 “ *Parliament.*” Upon this, a bill was brought in by
 Mr. (now Lord) Western, imposing a duty of 24*s.* 3*d.*
 a quarter on wheat, when the price should be under
 63*s.* ; 2*s.* 6*d.* a quarter when between that price and
 66*s.* ; and 6*d.* when above 66*s.*, which was afterwards
 passed into an act. This law proved practically in-
 operative, for the harvest of 1804, especially the wheat
 crop was very deficient, not only in this country but on
 the continent of Europe generally, and, in conse-
 quence, the price advanced in December to 86*s.* 2*d.* the
 quarter. The quality of the wheat too was very in-
 ferior, so that the average price scarcely exhibits the full
 extent of the rise ; in October, 1804, fine white wheat
 was quoted, in Mark Lane, 90*s.* to 92*s.*, and in
 January, 1805, white Dantzic at 100*s.*, 120*s.*, and
 126*s.* a quarter. On this recurrence of dearth, various
 strikes and combinations to advance wages took place
 among the manufacturers, and an advance of wages
 was pretty generally established by the working classes,
 though by no means adequate to the increased cost of
 provisions.

The weather, previous to the harvest of 1805, was
 unsettled, and the average price of wheat rose to
 98*s.* 4*d.* in the month of August; but the weather then
 taking up, and the crops having been well secured,
 and proving better than was expected, a fall of 20*s.* a
 quarter occurred by the end of the year. It was in this
 year that a new coalition was formed by the govern-

ments of this country, and those of Austria and Prussia, against France, which resulted in the following year in the complete subjugation of Prussia by Napoleon. The Prussian government had, in March 1806, prohibited British ships from entering into any of its ports or rivers, a measure which threatened to cut off all supply of corn from the Baltic, and the appearance of the crops being unpromising, the price of wheat rose again to 84s. in June. The harvest, however, having been about an average, and the promise of the succeeding year favourable, the price again declined in the summer of 1806 to 73s. 5d., and continued to fall till after the harvest of 1807, which was but moderately productive. The price of wheat was in November, 1807, 66s. In the beginning of 1808, the scantiness of the preceding crop was apparent, and under the effect of political events*, on which it is no part of my purpose to comment, the Baltic was completely closed against the British flag. The farmers, too, who under the influence of recent fluctuations had become speculators in grain, very generally withheld their stocks from market in anticipation of higher prices, it being then computed that an average crop did not suffice for the nation's consumption without the aid of importation. Hence prices immediately began to rise, distillation from grain was prohibited, and all the then usual preparations for an apprehended scarcity were made. The

* It may save the trouble of reference to mention, that the Berlin decree followed the battle of Jena in the autumn of 1806. The British orders in council were issued in 1807, and the bombardment of Copenhagen, and the Russian embargo on British shipping, occurred in the autumn of the same year. The nonintercourse act of America, consequent on the orders in council, was passed in 1808.

harvest of 1808 was deficient; no foreign supply was obtainable, and there was, in fact, a small balance of exports of about 15,000 quarters of wheat to Spain and Portugal. Wheat rose to 81*s.* 1*d.* in July, 1808, and to 92*s.* at the close of the year. Yet such were the obstructions to importation, that no foreign supply was forthcoming. In March, 1809, the average price of wheat reached 95*s.*; but the crops promised well, and in July the price got down to 86*s.* 6*d.* The harvest season turned out so exceedingly wet, that scarcely any part of the crops was secured in good order, and, besides, the quantity of wheat proved to be below an average. The average price, therefore, rose in December to 102*s.* 6*d.*, though the best samples were worth 125*s.* a quarter. Some 400,000 quarters of corn were imported from France and the Netherlands during the year under licenses from the British and French governments.

The spring of 1810 was cold and ungenial, and the crops were generally very backward, circumstances which, with the known deficiency of the stock in hand, raised wheat to the average of 116*s.* in August. At this time the expenses of freight, insurances, and licenses on wheat amounted to the enormous sum of from 38*s.* to 50*s.* per quarter; yet the importation in 1810 amounted to about 1,500,000 quarters of wheat and flour, and 600,000 quarters of other grain and meal. About the middle of August the weather cleared up, and the whole of the crops were secured in good order. Wheat at once declined, and was at the price of 97*s.* 1*d.* by the close of the year. The corn dealers, who are stated to have speculated largely upon the unpropitious appearances of the early season of the year were severe sufferers, and many of them became bankrupt.

The price continued to fall till June, 1811, when it was 86s. 11d. In August a reaction occurred, and the price advanced till the eve of the harvest of 1812, when the *average* price was 155s. 1d. In Mark Lane, the best Dantzic wheat fetched 180s. ; and oats were sold as high as 84s. a quarter!! The crop of 1811 had been deficient, but not so strikingly so as to attract particular attention ; and though the weather, during the harvest of 1812, was unsettled, it was not so decidedly bad as to injure the crops ; and opinions varied as to the probable yield. Of foreign supply, from the vast expenses of importation, there was no prospect. In this year the dealers seldom showed a sample, the corn was always bespoke—a fact, which, to those who know aught of the details of corn dealing, indicates, perhaps more than any other circumstance, the insufficiency of the supply. At this period farmers and landlords had the fullest conviction that the high range of prices of the previous three years would be permanent ; and accordingly this was the time when rents experienced the greatest rise, and speculations in land became most general. All purchases of land made before 1811 turned out profitable, if sold during the years 1812 and 1813. I have often heard a relation of my own, who began farming some fifty years ago, and who confessed to having put by 3000l. (beyond his housekeeping expenses) from the occupation of about 1200 acres, in more than one year of the “good times,” say, that he had made far more money by the purchase and resale of land than by farming. This gentleman commenced life with a large sum of money, and his purchases of land have been only such as his ample means justified ; but I suspect that not a few of the landowners, who

most strenuously clamour for protection, are to a certain extent in the condition of the speculator, who some years ago petitioned Parliament for relief, representing that he had in the years 1811 and 1812 "laid out" 150,000*l.*, partly his own and partly borrowed, in the "purchase of land, which had since so much fallen in value that he was ruined by the loss." After such a precedent, speculators, who have been ruined by the purchase of foreign *securities*, must be persons of exemplary modesty not to have preferred their complaints to the legislature.

In the autumn of 1812, the price of wheat fell to 113*s.* 6*d.*, at about which average it stood till the month of August, 1813, when, the harvest having proved very abundant, the price again declined to 73*s.* 6*d.* in December. The fall in corn was accelerated by the events of the war, which seemed to promise that at no distant time the whole of the continent of Europe would be again open to the British merchant. In evidence that the high price of 1812 mainly arose from scarcity, it may be mentioned that in France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and Portugal, a nearly corresponding rise of prices occurred. By the July of 1814, wheat was at 66*s.* the quarter, and would probably have been lower but for the severity of the previous winter and the backward and unpromising character of the season; and, in the event, the crop of that year was injured to a considerable extent, though the great breadth of cultivation, and the superabundant produce of 1813, together with an importation of 800,000 quarters, brought down the market price of wheat (after a temporary rise of 10*s.* a quarter), to 65*s.* 8*d.* per quarter, at the termination of the year.

SECTION II.

STATE OF AGRICULTURE AND THE CORN TRADE FROM 1814 TO 1828.

It has been necessary in the preceding section to trace somewhat minutely the fluctuations in the price of corn, which occurred during the war, in order to show what was the origin of those variations, as well as of the almost famine prices of corn in certain years. But though the oscillations of price were great, the general average of the period was extremely high, wheat being from 1794 to 1814 no less than 89*s.* 7*d.* a quarter.

It is most essential to a due estimate of the operation of the corn laws since 1814, that the real causes of the previous high prices of provisions should be thoroughly understood; for we find men writing and talking vaguely of the "prosperity" of the country during the war, and seeking to reproduce that state of things which was the combined result of dearth and obstructed foreign trade. As I have briefly shown—and further researches into the records of those times will more completely confirm my views—that, with the exception of the landed interest and (from causes presently to be noticed) those engaged in manufacturing enterprises, all classes suffered most severely during the earlier years of the contest, and it was only towards 1809 and 1810, when high prices had assumed the appearance of permanence, that wages, salaries, and professional remuneration were raised in any proportion to the increased expenses of living. It was the vast extension of our manufactures, especially those connected with

the cotton trade, which enabled this country to make the progress it did during the war, in spite of the obstacles and difficulties imposed by the obstructions of the contest, and to grow so much in wealth and power as to consume yearly increasing quantities of corn and other necessities at such prodigious prices. No one can doubt that but for the burthens of the war—amongst which, it cannot be too often repeated, must be reckoned the high price of corn from obstructions to foreign supplies in years of scarcity—the accessions to the wealth, and power, and population of the nation, for which it is so largely indebted to manufactures, would have been infinitely greater than those which actually accrued. The sudden gains obtained by the owners and tillers of the soil formed, during the high prices of the war, a deduction from the general means of the nation; and the claim of the landed interest to be exempted by legislative enactment, at the expense of the rest of the community, from the effects of restored abundance, after having profited so largely by a rise of prices far beyond the ratio of deficiency, seems upon every consideration of principle and policy to be so unjust and unwise, that a very strong case of necessity for such exemption ought to be made. Whether such a case has been made out remains to be seen.

At all events, no sooner had the price of corn fallen in 1814, than loud and general demands from the agriculturists were made on the legislature for protection against foreign competition. Then commenced that struggle, that hitherto fruitless struggle (which is still continued on the part of the landowners), to obtain for their commodities, in seasons of abundance, the prices of scarcity and dearth. Accordingly, committees of the Houses of

Lords and Commons were appointed to inquire into the allegations of agricultural distress, both of which examined numerous witnesses—landlords, farmers, surveyors, and corn-dealers;—and the Commons' Committee presented a report, which formed the basis of our corn law legislation. Before I address myself to that report, as showing the objects and opinions of those who prevailed in founding a prohibitory system with respect to foreign corn, I will just stop to notice that the law of 1804, which imposed a duty of 24*s.* 3*d.* a quarter on wheat when the average price did not exceed 63*s.*, never came into operation at all, inasmuch as up to 1814, the average price was constantly above the importation limit, and our ports therefore continued always open to the reception of foreign corn *when it could be obtained*. The committee in their report proposed to consider the subject referred to them under three heads.—1st. As it related to the then “recent extension and improvement of agriculture;” 2ndly. As to the then “present expense of cultivation, *including the rent*,” 3dly. “The price necessary to remunerate the grower.” The report then stated that all the witnesses ascribed “the great increase which had taken place in the annual produce of our soil, and the late rapid extension of the improved system of our husbandry” to the stimulus afforded by the high prices of the previous twenty years—a conclusion there is no reason to question. The report then added, “The great source of “encouragement is to be traced to the increasing “population and growing opulence of the United “Kingdom; but it is also not to be concealed, that “these causes, which they trust will be of a permanent and progressive nature, *have been incidentally “but considerably aided by those events, which, during*

“*the continuance of the war, operated to check the importation of foreign corn.*” Here is a distinct explanation of the real origin of the high prices; the committee made no mistake as to the cause of the lower prices then complained of by the landed interest, and as I shall presently show, the active partizans of that interest out of doors used a very thin veil to cover the real object—the maintenance of high rents. This they imagined might be effected by substituting high import duties on grain in lieu of the impediments caused by the war.

The report went on to say, “*The sudden removal of these impediments appears to have created among the occupiers of land a certain degree of alarm, which, if not allayed, would tend to prevent the inclosure and cultivation of great tracts of land still lying waste and unproductive, but also to counteract the spirit of improvement in other quarters, and to check its progress on lands already under tillage.*” Now, the proverb that “gold may be bought too dear” applies with great force to the observation of the committee about waste and unproductive land; and that the progress of tillage would not be so rapid under moderate prices, as when wheat might be run up to 7*l.* 15*s.* a quarter under apprehensions of deficiency is so plain, that the statement is a mere truism. The question which ought then to have been fairly considered was, what, under the altered state of circumstances, would have been the safest foundation for agriculture. The committee stated, that money rent had been doubled within the previous twenty years, but that the landlord’s share of the gross produce, which used to be one-third, was at that time not more than from one-fourth to one-fifth, and that the expenses of stocking and cul-

tivating a farm had been likewise doubled. When it is considered that the rent of land can only be that portion of the produce which remains after payment of the expenses of cultivation, and the lowest rate of remuneration for which farmers will consent to expend their capital and labour in husbandry; and that every fresh application of capital to cultivated land, and every resort to inferior land—the “waste and unproductive tracts” of the committee—is attended with a less return in proportion to the outlay; and when it is known, nay, stated by the committee, that the supply of corn during the war was drawn from our own soils by means of extended tillage and improved systems of husbandry, it does betray a tendency to hasty conclusions on the part of the committee to complain, that rents (though admittedly double in amount), formed a smaller proportion of the “gross produce” of the land, than they did in former times of lower prices and less extended cultivation.

It is so all-important to the elucidation of the corn law question, that the nature and origin of rent should be precisely defined, that I shall borrow from Colonel Thompson’s “True Theory of Rent*” a few clear statements upon that point.

“It is easy to imagine the existence of a country in which the land should be of a uniform and high quality, and where, from the great facility of procuring crops, and the consequent non-improvement of agricultural science, the cultivators should, for ages together, have no idea of the processes by which an European farmer forces

* *Exercises Political and Others*, by Lieut. Col. T. Perronet Thompson, vol. iv, p. 404: a work, which, from the extent and variety of its contents no less than from its logical and accurate argument, forms the most complete manual of political economy extant.

an increased crop through the expenditure of an increased quantity of capital upon the land. The whole of the cultivated portion of Egypt, and great part of India, present specimens of such a state of things, yet in both these countries a heavy rent is paid to the great landlord, which is the government. The simple cause of rent in such countries, and everywhere else, is, in reality, nothing but what Adam Smith pointed out long ago. It is the same that gives rise to the rent of the vineyard that produces Tokay. It is *the limited quantity of the land, in comparison with the competitors for its produce*; or, as it is sometimes termed, the monopoly."

And the author here explains that

"When the term monopoly is thus applied to land, it does not necessarily mean a monopoly arising from any immediate act of the owner; for a monopoly in the sense here meant, will arise to a certain extent under any system that can be imagined. There must always be a monopoly of the best land, the nearest land, and that which is most favourably situated for the consumption of its produce; and this monopoly must cause such land to yield a rent."

And he illustrates his definition thus:—

"Let the case be supposed of a small number of settlers taking possession of a large and fertile island; and let the soil be so good, and their habits of agricultural energy so limited, that a slight scratching of the ground and throwing in the seed shall be all the cultivation they at first think of bestowing, as for ages together has been a picture of the agriculture of many tropical countries. If the land was unappropriated, and every man might occupy at will, it is plain that in the commencement no man would pay another any rent, either for leave to cultivate, or for the grass, wood, &c., which might be the spontaneous produce. Or if instead of the land being entirely unappropriated, the right of property in it was vested in a number of owners, but who were without the means of bringing the land into immediate cultivation, it would be equally plain that the competition would in the commencement reduce the rent which any of them could obtain to the lowest possible magnitude, which is, in fact, no magnitude at all. In such an establishment, the degree of each man's wealth, supposing him to possess the brief capital required for setting his industry in motion, would be in proportion to the exertions of himself or of his family. He that by his activity could raise or collect much corn, fruit, sheep, furs, or whatever else were the objects of industry within his reach, would be comparatively rich."

And such is very much the condition of a new and fertile colony.

“But when population and cultivation had increased so as to begin to press against the limits of the soil contained in the whole island, and there was no longer new land to be had for asking, a very different scene would begin to arise. All the population which was not employed in agricultural labour, or supported without labour upon some kind of previous accumulation, must apply itself to manufacturing industry. And as the number of persons so employed increased, a competition would arise among them for the products of agriculture upon which they must live; and this competition would oblige them to give a greater portion of the results of their own labour, in return for a smaller and less luxurious quantity of agricultural produce than they had been accustomed to receive. It is true that the land must finally find food for all that live on it, as the vineyard finds wine for all that finally drink Tokay; but it does not therefore follow, that many of those who live on it, may not, when their numbers have increased, live much less abundantly than they used to do, and give a much greater quantity of the results of their own labour in return for a given quantity of the produce. It is proved by the experience of all countries, that moderately good land is capable of producing food for many times the number of hands required for its cultivation; so that all these numbers may be called into being to assist in the demand. Hence, if the exchange of commodities was conducted by the intervention of a circulating medium, the money price of agricultural produce must rise in comparison with the money prices of other commodities. *The landowners would then begin to get rich, through the simple fact of their being landowners, and there being no more land to own.*”

Now, this is an exact description of the position of the owners of land during the period from 1794 to 1814, stripped of its accessory and subordinate circumstances. Again,—

“If it should be found some day that a contiguous island had sprung up of the same nature with the first, their prospect of increased wealth would drop at once; and every thing would go on as it did at the commencement, till the new island had been peopled and cultivated like the other. But if this does not happen, the lucky landowners will incontinently begin to swell into men of landed wealth. If they keep their land in their own hands, they

will rise into what are termed gentlemen-farmers, or men who unite in their own persons the characters of landlord and cultivator. But as soon as what they obtain by the sale of their produce, is sufficiently greater than the amount for which they can hire one of their less fortunate neighbours, who is heir to his own industry and no land beside, the greater part of them will hire a farming-man or overseer with part of the produce, and sit down in the enjoyment of the *otium cum dignitate* of landed gentlemen with the remainder. And from this step of the farming-man, they will soon proceed to the further one, of finding a farming-man who will advance his own capital, making an adequate deduction out of the produce in return; or, in other words, a farmer or tenant. The reason of this further step will be, their desire to get more completely rid of the trouble of superintending the employment of the capital; for a tenant has his own interest at stake in watching it with the utmost exactness, while a farming-man, having no such interest, must still be superintended in a considerable degree. And all the *residuum* left after delivering to the tenant the portion of the proceeds which the competition among individuals of his class obliges him to accept, will be rent. And what the tenant will be obliged to accept, will be such a part of the price of the produce, as will return him the capital he must lay out, with the lowest rate of profit for which men under the existing habits of the society will consent to lay out farming capital and superintend its employment. But of the existence of this *residuum*, the primary cause is manifestly the increased price of corn."

Now, from the scheme which the landowners hit upon of prohibiting the importation of corn into this "island" until the average price reached 80s. the quarter, it is clear they were quite aware that "the primary cause of this *residuum*," or rent, was the increased price of corn; at all events, that the cent. per cent. they had obtained within the twenty years previous to 1814, was mainly brought into existence by the high prices. The termination of the war, by putting an end to the obstructions to importation, acted upon the interests of the owners of land in this country, to some extent, like the springing up of the "new island" of Colonel Thompson's illustration. They had immediately a less close monopoly; they were exposed to the competition

of the continental growers of corn, and, in the absence of prohibitory law, would have lost, in the first instance, all that portion of their increased rental which had been occasioned by a succession of indifferent seasons when no extraneous aid could be obtained; but they would have retained all that portion which accrued to them from their monopoly of "the best land, and the nearest land, and that which is most favourably situated for the consumption of its produce." All that increase of rent, which was the natural result of the "increasing population and growing opulence" of the nation must have, and, in fact, has been retained by those who own its soil. That the landowners would not have been without ample compensation for the loss of even that portion of their gains, which was derived from national misfortunes, will appear in the progress of this examination; their natural "monopoly" would have secured to them all the increase of rent consequent upon the national progress in wealth and civilization, although a somewhat reduced breadth of tillage (an occurrence by no means likely) had been the result of leaving the corn trade and the farming trade to their natural channels.

Some measure of the proportion of the actual war rents, which the landowners would have naturally retained after the obstructions of the war had ceased, may be found in the following extract from the evidence of Professor Low given in 1833, which shows, that even after twenty years of unsuccessful struggle against the laws of supply and demand, and the mischievous fluctuations thereby caused, the average rent of land in *Scotland* was nearly double what it had been previous to the year 1794. The following is his description

of the effects of the rise of prices upon the Scotch tenantry :—

“ Rents began to increase in Scotland with the commencement of the war, and the ratio of the increase increased after the scarcities of 1799 and 1800. From 1800 to 1804, the situation of the agriculture of Scotland was highly favourable ; during that period, rent had not become excessive, or charges so oppressive as they afterwards became. Many farmers held old leases, and by realising capital, *were enabled to extend their concerns, or establish their sons in farms.* Those circumstances, added to the increasing demand for *farm produce of all kinds, gave a great stimulus to rents,* which continued to operate till the year 1814. Comparing the period from the year 1781 to 1794, with the period from 1800 to 1804, I think the average rise of rents in Scotland was about 86 per cent. ; and comparing the same period, 1781 to 1794, with that from 1804 to the end of the war, I think there was a rise of about 150 per cent. on a medium.”

And he afterwards said, that on comparing the average rate of rent in Scotland from 1781 to 1794 with that of the present day, it was then (1833) about 90 per cent. higher than before the war.

This is a practical comment upon Colonel Thompson's accurate and scientific definitions of rent ; and will be usefully kept in view when we come to see how ill the attempt of the landowners, to secure the famine portion of their war rents through the creation of an artificial scarcity by the law of 1815, succeeded.

It is true that the scientific examinations of economical questions, with which most persons of ordinary information are now familiar, had not then obtained such general currency as at present, and that a real apprehension of possible impediments to the future supplies of foreign grain did to some extent exist ; but a reference to the arguments and assertions by which the committee's recommendation of a protecting duty on wheat of 80s. a quarter was supported by persons of

repute and ability, will convince the most incredulous that the assumption of rent to be a fixed quantity was not altogether the result of ignorance. Besides, many of the evils which have been since caused by the corn laws, were clearly pointed out in 1815 by the parliamentary opponents of those laws. The committee of 1814 considered and inquired with great diligence as to "the present expense of cultivation, *including the rent*," an arbitrary classification, which plainly implied a Canute-like determination to say, "happen what may, rents shall not fall." Circumstances, however, have proved too strong for landlords or legislators. The advocates of protection in Parliament then used very little of that reserve, now almost universal amongst them, in asserting their main object—the maintenance of rents. In a tract written by Mr. Jacob, and published in 1814, entitled, "Considerations on the Protection required by British Agriculture," broadly asserts the same argument. He says (p. 82), "Among
 "many we frequently hear the landed proprietors censured for having raised the rent of their lands, and
 "such persons exclaim, 'the rents must be lowered ;'
 "this, therefore, requires some consideration. A considerable class in the country, possessors of estates
 "derived from their ancestors, important to the community by their rank, by their education, and their
 "virtues, from which has hitherto been drawn the far
 "greater portion of our statesmen, our magistrates, our
 "clergy, and the officers of our army and navy, have
 "been compelled by the increased expense of every
 "article, both of necessity and luxury, to follow the
 "march of circumstances, and increase their revenues,
 "not by any force, but by voluntary conventions with
 "their tenants, who, on their part, have cheerfully

“agreed to give an increased income, the advance on
 “their productions enabling them to do so without in-
 “juring themselves. *Now, without any abatement in*
“the cost of those articles, which are indispensable in
“their rank, without any reduction on the imposts,
 “which bear with peculiar pressure on them, these re-
 “spectable members of the community are expected to
 “reduce their incomes.’ . . . ‘Must the newly-acquired
 “proprietors of land, who have invested their capital
 “in purchases, which produce much less annuity than
 “they could have obtained from other modes of invest-
 “ment, see their incomes reduced to a still lower
 “standard, *and that whilst the stockholder is to suffer*
“no reduction?””

Now, this language betrays an ignorance or neglect of first principles, not a little astonishing in so acute a writer as Mr. Jacob ; but it plainly marks the objects avowed, and the manner in which they were supported, by the protectionists in that day. Yet Mr. Jacob does not trust to such arguments to prejudice, as I have extracted, for in earlier passages he had very elaborately endeavoured to show : First,—That no more than about a month’s consumption of corn in this country could be, under any circumstances, imported from abroad, and that, therefore, habitually to rely upon a foreign supply would be highly impolitic. This seems an odd way of addressing those who were in an agony of alarm at an expected influx of cheap foreign corn. In the position of Mr. Jacob, that the quantity of wheat which could be profitably imported into this country under the most unlimited freedom of trade, has been at all times greatly exaggerated, I entirely agree, as well as in his observations that “there is great reason to apprehend, that
 “ignorance of the relative quantity of grain which is

“ produced at home, to that which is imported from
 “ other countries, has been the cause of the greatest
 “ fluctuations ;” and that “ both in 1805 and 1812,
 “ the prices of corn were raised far beyond what the
 “ deficiency in the quantity grown could have justified.”
 Having shown that no great proportion of our whole
 consumption of grain could be drawn from abroad, he
 argues, secondly, that it was desirable to “ hope for a
 “ return of the circumstances which, till the year 1766,
 “ had long existed in this country, when we had not only
 “ sufficient for our own consumption, but had usually
 “ a surplus quantity of corn for that of other coun-
 “ tries ;” that this was only to be effected “ by giving
 “ such encouragement to agriculture as will convince
 “ the most cautious that, in embarking their property
 “ in such operations, they shall be secured, *as far as*
 “ *legislative enactments can secure them*, from any risks
 “ but such as arise from their own negligence, or from
 “ unfruitful seasons ; and as the dread of competition
 “ with those, who, from various causes, can raise corn
 “ cheaper than the British husbandman, acts as a check
 “ on our cultivation, the rendering such a competition
 “ impossible, would give the strongest stimulus to those
 “ who have property to embark in agriculture.” He
 then cites the opinions of the witnesses examined be-
 fore the parliamentary committees of that year, to prove
 that wheat *could* not be produced under 80*s.*, and pro-
 poses a protecting duty of 88*s.* a quarter.

This evidence is not a little curious, and for the
 sake of contrasting the agricultural calculations of 1814
 with those of subsequent periods, I must briefly refer
 to the statements of some of the witnesses.

Mr. Buxton, from Essex, laid before the Lords’
 committee a variety of calculations to show that wheat

should sell at from 95s. to 100s. per quarter, barley 45s., and oats 35s., to pay the expense of the farmer. Mr. Driver, the land-surveyor, thought 5*l.* a quarter for wheat was the price necessary for the protection of the grower: this gentleman's evidence, as to the manner of valuing land, is instructive, as showing how utterly at sea land-valuers are, and must be, under such an artificial system of prices as that occasioned by the corn laws. He at one time thought 5*l.* a quarter the natural price of wheat in England, afterwards lowered his estimate to 90s., and finally settled at 80s., the then act of Parliament price. Mr. Lake, from Kent, "proved most clearly," that wheat at 84s., beans at 42s., and barley at 32s. per quarter, would create a loss to the farmer of 7*s.* 4*d.* per acre! The Scotch farmers in those days thought they could live at the prices which were to ruin the husbandmen of Kent. Mr. Benett, from Wiltshire (now one of the members for South Wilts), produced a very detailed statement of the expenses and produce of a farm of 945 acres in that county: taking the price of wheat at 96s., barley at 48s. a quarter, there was, according to Mr. Benett's calculations, a yearly loss sustained of 66*l.* I well remember this gentleman's first contest for the representation of Wilts, when none of his supporters could show themselves without being saluted with "no barley bannock," "no oat cake," and divers similar cries, which sufficiently indicated the popular estimate of his evidence amongst *bread-eaters* and the labouring classes of that county. The only witness, who thought a less price than 80s. sufficient, was Mr. Mant, who—provided the property tax was taken off and labour reduced—fixed 72s. for wheat, an opinion then deemed an agricultural heresy of the worst sort,

for which he was taken to task by Mr. Jacob without mercy. In all these calculations rent was assumed to be an immutable portion of the expenses.

Such were the opinions which prevailed in the legislature in 1814, and which, in the following year, ripened into a corn law, prohibiting importation of grain until the average price of wheat reached 80s. a quarter, and barley and oats in that proportion. And what was the result? The agriculturist was assured of high prices, "as far as legislative enactment could secure them," and foreign competition had been "rendered impossible," except in a time of famine, yet (the previous harvest having been propitious) in December, 1815, the *average price of wheat was 53s. 7d. a quarter, barley 25s. 11d., and oats 19s. 9d.*; and, in January, 1816, the averages were still lower, being for wheat 52s. 6d., barley 24s. 8d., oats 18s. 7d., a lower point of depression in the prices of corn than had occurred since 1804! This was enough to have shaken the faith of the farmer, who was promised 85s. to 90s. for his wheat, and *whose burthens were calculated on such data*, in legislative protection. It is remarkable, that during those low prices a foreign demand for British wheat arose in the south of Europe; but a severe frost and heavy fall of snow in February of 1816, together with accounts of scarcity and rising prices in France and Germany, caused the price to advance, so that in May the average for wheat was 74s. It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader that the summer of 1816 was the most inclement, and the harvest the most disastrous which had occurred in this country since 1799. The crop of grain was both deficient in quantity and inferior in quality, and the average price of wheat rose in December to 103s.

The season was even worse on the Continent than in this country, so that only 100,000 quarters were imported during the year, though the ports were open from the month of August. The continental prices, in fact, exceeded those of this country: at Vienna, Munich, and Stuttgart, in September, 1816, wheat was 116*s.* 10*d.*, 127*s.* 2*d.*, and 127*s.* 1*d.* respectively; and advanced, by September of 1817, at the two latter places to 141*s.* 2*d.* and 138*s.* 7*d.* a quarter. In France, wheat was in June, 1817, as high as 137*s.* 6*d.* a quarter. During that year no less than 300,000 quarters were shipped thither from this country. Under these circumstances the price of wheat reached in June, 1817, 117*s.* a quarter. This revived the hopes of the landed interest, who began to imagine their former "prosperity" was returning. That such an enormous rise in price would more than compensate the growers of corn for the badness of the season will be evident to all who know the details of rural affairs. Though the great bulk of the crop was injured, it was not absolutely spoiled, and most farmers would have saved some small portion in tolerable condition, which, selling for much more than the average price, would make their total receipts very considerable.

It is certain, that in seasons of general deficiency or injury to the crops, the growers of corn are fully compensated, upon the principle I have before adverted to, *viz.* that the ratio of increase in price is greater than the actual deficiency; if, therefore, the farmer can be secured from all fluctuations, except those caused by the seasons, and have his burthens calculated according to a steady average price of years of ordinary fertility, he will be effectually insured against bad seasons by the rise of price which is certain in such seasons to occur.

Up to June of 1817 the weather was unpromising, and the average of wheat of that month was 111s. 6d. a quarter; then, however, the season became finer, and the crops, though not very abundant, were in part secured in moderately good order. The average fell in October to 77s., and the ports remained closed till February of the following year, the average having then been for some time upwards of 84s. The summer of 1818 was as remarkable for heat and drought as that of 1816 had been for wet, and considerable apprehensions of scarcity were entertained. Hay rose to 9l. and 10l. a load, and beans, peas, turnips, and potatoes were believed to have completely failed. Hay was, in this year, imported from New York. Upwards of 1,500,000 quarters of wheat had been imported, and, as is always the case in dry seasons, the yield of wheat turned out better than from the smallness of the quantity of straw had been expected; the average for wheat fell in December, 1818, to 78s. 10d. per quarter. From the peculiar character of the season other grain was much dearer, beans and peas being worth nearly as much as wheat. The produce of the harvest of 1819* was an average one, and the price of wheat for the year was 72s. The winter of 1819-20 was severe, and the spring cold until June, when some fine weather occurred, becoming again unsettled until August, when it cleared, and the crops were well ripened and got in. The price of wheat fluctuated with

* I have not made any especial reference to the resumption of cash payments, because, even if there was any thing in the arguments of those "who have bewildered themselves in the mazes of the currency theory," its effect would have been to depress the prices of corn and other commodities in an equal proportion.

the weather between 65*s.* and 72*s.* a quarter. The bulk and yield of the crop exceeded expectation, and the average of wheat got down to 54*s.* in December; falling again, by July of 1821, to 51*s.* a quarter. The produce of this abundant harvest was estimated at full one-third above an average crop, taking into consideration the greatly extended breadth which had been cultivated under the influence of the temporary rise of 1817 and 1818. 1820-21 was a mild winter, but the spring was cold, the summer and harvest time showery; and, though the bulk of corn was large, its condition was not good. A speculative rise in the price of wheat to 62*s.* took place in September, 1821, falling again to 50*s.* at the end of the year; and further, by August, 1822, to the low average of 42*s.* a quarter. It must be remarked, however, that the inferior quality of the wheat of 1821 had a considerable share in producing so low an average price. 1822 was fine, and the crop secured in excellent order.

Again a loud cry of agricultural distress was raised, and a committee was appointed by the House of Commons, which sat in April, 1821. This committee examined a great number of witnesses, and made a report, which is in many respects remarkable, and in none more so than in the indications it affords that experience was surely, though slowly, teaching the more intelligent of the agriculturists, by hard and stern lessons, the futility of legislative protection. It required, however, some fifteen years more ere the full effect of that teaching was made manifest before the committee of 1836.

The period just past under review, *viz.* from 1814 to 1821, is one of the most eventful in the history of British commerce. It was a time of transition from

the high prices and speculation in exorbitant fluctuations, which, from their long continuance, appeared to the majority of traders necessary incidents to commercial undertakings,—to the ordinary current of peaceful commerce. That to the agricultural interest—meaning thereby farmers and landlords—it was undoubtedly a time of anxiety and suffering has never been denied. During the war, from the causes before adverted to, the occupation of agriculture, which in all ages has been one of slow and steady progress, a pursuit wherein attention to minute details and frugal industry could alone secure competence, had become the field for the most reckless and daring speculations. Whilst prices were continually rising from year to year, as, with a few temporary exceptions, was the case throughout the war, and corn, no matter at what expense raised, was certain to be sold with great profit, men would be certain to be crowding hap-hazard into the business of husbandry. Persons, without any capital of their own, undertook farms in the confident expectation that after one or two crops, sold at increasing prices, they would be enabled to maintain their ground. Others extended their concerns beyond the limits a sober estimate of their means could have justified, in full reliance upon permanently high prices and a rising market. Tradesmen left their own occupations to become farmers, and so great had become the competition for farms, more especially in the latter part of the war, that landlords, instead of being active agents in advancing rents, had only to select their tenant from a host of candidates. This state of excitement naturally led to speculative purchases of land by mere jobbers, as well as by already existing landowners.

All these operations were greatly assisted by the facility with which landowners and farmers obtained accommodation from country bankers, who were as eager to extend the circulation of their paper promises to pay, as the agriculturists were to use them, and with as full a belief in an unlimited and indefinite rise of prices. The same sort of thing was going on in the trading world under the influence of the Bank of England issues. The result of these conjoint operations was to depreciate the whole currency, and in the year 1814—the time of the greatest depreciation—to the extent of 25*l.* 2*s.* 6*d.* per cent.; in fact, that which in that year was, by courtesy, called a one pound note, was worth a fraction less than 15*s.* So far as regarded the landed interest, the whole of this flimsy structure, this air-blown bubble of “prosperity,” was dependent upon a continuance of the high prices of scarcity, and the existing obstructions to the importation of grain.

It is not a little amusing to observe, in the examinations of the committee of 1836, the innocent simplicity with which Mr. Cayley refers, as to a kind of elysian age, to the time when the farmer, with no other security than a growing crop of grain, could obtain from the country bankers advances to enable him to carry on the cultivation of his farm and gather in the crop, from the price of which the advances were expected to be repaid. That such ticklish operations were performed, and in many instances with temporary success, must be admitted; but like those venturous gentlemen, who, speculating in *rouge et noir*, came off winners for a time, the successful performance of one such transaction induced, nay necessitated another, and, as in both cases, constant success could only happen if *all the chances turned out in favour*

of the speculator. "The pitcher goes too often to the well."

The year 1814 brought peace and plenty. I can recollect the exuberant rejoicings of that time, the transparencies of "Peace and Plenty," and the illuminated cornucopias with which the inhabitants of my native district (one entirely agricultural) celebrated the nation's deliverance from a twenty years' war, though I little thought how busily our representatives were then engaged in devising an artificial scarcity. The conditions upon which these reckless agricultural speculations could alone succeed having altogether failed, the failures amongst farmers and land speculators became very numerous, and many of the country bankers, who had been in effect co-speculators with them, failed also. This occasioned some reduction in the amount of the currency, which, therefore, rapidly increased in value: in 1817 and 1818, the depreciation of the circulating medium was only 2*l.* 13*s.* 2*d.* per cent.; in 1819, when cash payments were resumed, the depreciation was 4*l.* 9*s.* per cent., and in 1821, the real and nominal value of the currency became identical. From analogous causes a great fall in the prices of all other commodities between 1814 and 1817. The shipping interest was depressed, because the impediments arising out of the war being removed, the same amount of tonnage was equal to extended service; much shipping had been discharged from the transport service; and the reduced price of timber had naturally lessened the value of existing shipping. House property, also, declined in value from the greater cheapness of building materials. Of that fall, previous to 1818, Mr. Tooke says (vol. ii, p. 12), "Of that great and memorable fall of prices, the principal part be-

“ yond that which was the effect of the seasons, and a
 “ recoil from extravagant speculations in exportable
 “ commodities, is clearly attributable to the transition
 “ from war to peace ; not from war, as having caused
 “ an extra demand, but as having obstructed the
 “ supply, and increased the cost of production ; nor
 “ to peace, as having been attended with diminished
 “ consumption, but as having extended the sources of
 “ supply, and reduced the cost of production.” It is
 certain, however, that notwithstanding the sufferings of
 particular classes, and the temporary want of employ-
 ment in some trades, that the mass of the community
 greatly benefited by the return of peace and abundance.
 From that time the real wages of workmen became
 much higher by reason of the cheapness of all the
 necessaries of life ; and it is only necessary to glance at
 the progress of trade, in the interval between 1814 and
 1821, to find there is no reason to regret the times of
 scarcity and high prices.

In 1814 the merchant shipping of the United King-
 dom consisted of 8,975 vessels, of 1,209,248 tons,
 manned by 83,793 seamen, which had increased in
 1817 to 11,255 ships, of 1,625,121 tons, and 97,273
 seamen. In 1818 a great extension of import trade
 occurred, and the shipping was 13,006 vessels, of
 1,886,394 tons, and 111,880 men : from this there was a
 reaction, but by 1822 the shipping employed was about
 equal in number, tonnage, and seamen that of 1817.
 Wool, silk, and cotton were also imported in largely in-
 creasing, and as it proved for a time, in excessive quan-
 tities. Still, though loss was incurred by speculations in
 those articles in 1819, the quantities of them since im-
 ported and consumed have steadily and largely increased.
 The state of the revenue of 1821—particularly of the ex-

cise and customs—proves also the increased prosperity enjoyed by the mass of the people. The increase of our population had been coincident with our great advance in manufacturing industry, and a very considerable part of that increase up to 1821, was the result of the extraordinary diminution that had taken place in the rate of mortality. In 1780 the rate of mortality in England and Wales was in the ratio of 1 in 40; that, in fact, one-fortieth part of the whole population died annually; in 1790 the rate was reduced to 1 in 45; in 1801 the rate of mortality from the scarcity of that year was much increased, but on an average of the four or five preceding years it was 1 in 47; in 1811 the mortality was 1 in 52; in 1821, only 1 in 58, marking a regular progression in the comforts obtained by the numerous classes.

Let us now look at the state of the agricultural interest in 1821, as disclosed by the report of the committee of the House of Commons in that year. This committee was expressly appointed to consider “the petitions complaining of the depressed state of agriculture:” and they reported in substance—That the then present prices of corn, appeared by no means adequate to the charge of raising it, the tenant having to pay from his capital a considerable portion of his outgoings. That notwithstanding this pressure on the farmer must have affected the retail shopkeepers in country towns, official documents proved that the consumption of articles, the subjects of excise and customs’ duties, had increased in 1820, when compared with an average of the three preceding years. That our principal manufactures had also increased. Rents had hitherto been paid without arrear, except in particular

districts, *"a punctuality affording a hope that the tenantry possess resources which will enable them to surmount their difficulties,"* and that landlords had, in many instances, lowered their rents, not only on new leases but on subsisting contracts. That revulsions of the same nature, if not in the same degree, had occurred in different periods of our history, particularly in 1804 and 1814. That the statements and opinions then given on the ruinous operation of low prices, strikingly conformed with those contained in the evidence annexed to the report. That the fears of those who reasoned on the continuance of low prices, were naturally dissipated by the natural course of seasons and events. That in agriculture, and in all pursuits in which capital and industry are embarked, there had been and would be periods of reaction, a reaction proportioned to the previous prosperity of the pursuit, and the degree of personal exertion and investment of capital, prompted by that prosperity. *That there exists in the distribution of capital and labour a natural tendency to remedy such disorders, and any interference on the part of the legislature had often operated to prolong them.*

That the increase of rent during the war was owing to the diminished value of the currency, and *the extensive investment of capital in land*; but the proportion to be ascribed to either cause could not be accurately defined. That to the restoration of the currency the committee ascribed a part of the depression of prices, but expressed a belief, that *the ultimate effect on rent, of a resumption of cash payments*, would fall far short of some of the predictions suggested by the present alarm. That the diminution of rent, from this cause, could not, in the end, exceed that part of the

increase which grew out of the depreciation, perhaps it might not go so far.

That commodities had fallen in other countries, in at least an equal proportion to the fall of corn in England, and that such derangements were produced by the convulsions of the past thirty years, and which would *not cease until the habits and dealings of individuals, as well as the intercourse of nations, should have become adjusted to that state likely to become again the permanent condition of society.* That the then depression of the corn market was the result, not of the large importations of 1817 and 1818, but of the abundant crops at home in 1819, 1820; and that the supply of wheat from Ireland had greatly increased since 1806, when free import was "so judiciously" permitted. The report then took an historical view of the corn laws and corn trade in this country, which concludes with the opinion, "*that the only solid foundation of agricultural prosperity is laid in abstaining as much as possible from interfering, either by protection or prohibition, with any branch of industry.*" The report distinctly suggests, "that if we should create, by artificial means, too great a difference between the cost of subsistence in this and in other countries, it might have the effect of driving capital abroad, and of leaving our unpaid population to be maintained by the landed interest with diminished resources."

The disadvantages of the law of 1815 appeared to the committee to be, that it prompted the grower to extend the home cultivation, by the hope of a monopoly price, while its occasional interruption might deprive him of it when most wanted. To the consumer and

dealer it baffled all calculation. At one time, it exposed our market to be occasionally overloaded with foreign corn ; at another, in the event of a considerable deficiency in our own harvest, it created a competition on the Continent, by the effect of which prices were rapidly raised against us. Who can venture to deny that the above is an accurate account of the operation, not only of the corn law of 1815, but of every other corn law since enacted ? The report also refers to the fluctuations in the price of corn as dependent on our own seasons, and says, that as favourable or unfavourable seasons occur, not at short intervals, but at rather long cycles, and irregularly, *the situation of the grower of corn is rendered hazardous in a country in which the lowest price accounted necessary to afford him a remuneration considerably exceeds the prices of the rest of the world.* And the committee finally recommended a “ repeal of the then present law, and to lay open our “ trade in corn with all nations, subject only to such a “ duty as might compensate to the British grower the “ loss of the encouragement arising from the high “ freight and other import charges during the war.” No particular amount of duty was recommended by the committee. This is an able document, and indicates great progress, on the part of the members of the committee, in a knowledge of the true position and future prospects of the agricultural interest ; but they do not seem to have adverted, either in their report or in their examinations, to that which will, in the end, be found the only solution to agricultural difficulties, *viz.* the decreased cost of producing corn in periods of permanently low prices, and the practicability of vastly increasing the productiveness of lands already under

tillage, by the application of more capital and labour, and the adoption of improved husbandry.

The report, however, fell still born; it was too much in advance of the sentiment of the House of Commons, and no practical conclusion was founded upon it. Another committee was appointed in 1822, upon whose report an act was passed, by which the limit of total prohibition was nominally reduced from 80*s.* to 70*s.* a quarter for wheat; but then, an import duty of 12*s.* a quarter was imposed, if the price was under 80*s.*, *and a further duty of 5*s.* for the first three months* after the price should have been between 70*s.* and 80*s.* At a price above 80*s.* and under 85*s.* the duty was to be 5*s.*, and an additional duty for the first three months. This law would have been more injurious than that of 1815, but it was not to come into operation until the ports became open, by the average price reaching 80*s.*, and as that never occurred previously to the passing of the new act of 1828, it thereby became extinct, without ever having been called into effect. But, valuable as is the report of the committee of 1821, as a testimony of the impolicy of the then corn law, and for its assertion of the general principle of freedom and non-interference, it is in the evidence of the witnesses, in their commonly unconscious testimony *against* protective laws, that, in the present state of the question, the most important matter will be found.

In looking at that evidence, it must also be recollected, that nearly every witness had been marshalled by Mr. Webb Hall's committee of ultra-protectionists, and came forward under the firmest conviction that nothing but an absolute monopoly of the British market could save the agricultural interest from utter ruin.

I mention these circumstances merely to show that the testimony afforded by their evidence *against* protection, has all the value attributable to the testimony of unconscious or unwilling witnesses. I do not complain that their statements were overcharged, and their pictures of distress too highly coloured ; but I assert, that the very facts they mention to prove the necessity for protection, are completely condemnatory of restriction.

Mr. R. C. Harvey, a miller and farmer, from Norfolk, on the borders of Suffolk, largely engaged in the meal trade, and occupying land to the extent of 1,400 acres, partly his own and partly rented, and which he valued altogether at a rental of 1,500*l.*, gave a detailed account of the value, in money, of the produce of his farm. The yearly average for the three years ending in 1813, was 5,538*l.* ; for the three years ending in 1816, 3,984*l.* ; and for the three years ending in 1819, 6,860*l.* For 1820, his gross receipts were 4,099*l.*, and for that of 1821, he expected when his crops were sold his receipts would be nearly 30 per cent. less. This gentleman was not prepared with an account of his expenditure, though he admitted there had been a “good profit” upon the first and third series of three years, but alleged there had been a loss upon the three years in the second series. He had made no alteration in the mode of cultivating his farm in consequence of the state of the times, and said, that he had in his employ upon the farm *fifty* persons, men, women, and boys—a number admitted to be beyond that which was necessary ; but they were employed to keep them off the parish. The farm was stated to be in high condition, and that one-half was in corn, or a fourth of the whole wheat, and another fourth barley. Now, when we find this gentleman with such a superabundance

of labour, and farming without any change of system whatever, and that he had made, upon the average of the ten years, rather more than three rents and a half yearly, it does appear to have been a little chivalrous on his part to come and testify to the indispensable necessity of the price of 80s. a quarter for wheat, to enable the farmers of England to continue the cultivation of the soil. Any one who knows aught of husbandry will be aware, that with a very little alteration of system Mr. Harvey's farm might have been made highly profitable, notwithstanding a low price of corn. Besides, had he not been chiefly his own landlord, he would probably have thought some abatement in rent, from the scale of 1812, no more than reasonable. So much for this gentleman's direct evidence; incidentally he told the committee that rents in his district had not been generally reduced since 1814, and that the husbandry was in consequence degenerating, farmers having been obliged to pay their stipulated rents out of their capital. This had led to a reduction in their stock, to growing less turnips, and to much double cropping; that though there was no land gone out of cultivation, "there was a great proportion very fast approaching "bad management; farmers were catching at a straw, "and desirous of growing all they could in a year." His own crops had been best when other people's were worst, which he attributed to the high condition of his land; and he said, that fattening bullocks had paid the farmer just at the time, it appeared, the farmers were unable to buy or keep any bullocks to fat. Now, does not all this point most directly to the cause of the evil, *viz.* contracts by farmers to pay rents, calculated on the expectation that the price of wheat would never be

lower than 10s. a bushel, whereas it scarcely averaged 7s.? I will presently show how they dealt with this matter in Scotland, and what has been the result. Mr. Harvey admitted that the farmer would be glad of low prices, permanently low prices, if he could reap equal profits, because he would employ less capital. As regarded the labourers, they were well off when in regular employ, and where they had not been pauperised by magisterial interference. He also stated that his flour trade had increased, and that he sold, on an average, seventy sacks a week more among men he had served for years. This speaks volumes as to the condition of the mass of the people. He was himself then giving his men 1s. 9d. a day, and had never given more than 2s. 6d.

Another witness was Mr. Hanning, a considerable landed proprietor in Somerset and Devon. In the former county his property consisted of rich grazing and dairy (permanent grass) land, the "arable a rich friable sandy loam, capable of being worked at little comparative expense, and of growing crops of any description." He had reduced his rents since 1814, taking one with another about 20 per cent.; but the reductions to different tenants were made in very different proportions; some had had more than 30 per cent., and Mr. Hanning had found, that, which I am surprised all landlords do not sooner discover, "assisting poor tenants by deductions of rent was of no use," and he had in consequence adopted the plan of paying for manures, digging, &c., actually applied to the farm. Now, though this was unquestionably wise, if Mr. Hanning thought fit to retain tenants so deficient in the necessary capital, yet what a picture of hus-

bandry in the rich vales of Somerset does this evidence present. In North Devon this gentleman possessed some poor clay land, which twelve years before (1809) had been let at a rent of 500*l.* to a tenant who then possessed 2,000*l.* of capital; that rent had been recently reduced to 300*l.*, but the tenant was then two years in arrear, his capital was all gone, and if a distress had been then made upon him it would not have produced 200*l.* Surely in this case it would have been better, both for landlord and tenant, to have put an end to the holding. Here the tenant's capital had been obviously sunk in the fruitless struggle to keep up rents. It is not surprising that Mr. Hanning granted no leases, and the tenants desired none. His rents, after all his reductions, had considerably advanced since 1792.

What misery and turmoil were here inflicted upon landlord and tenants, through miscalculations sanctioned by act of Parliament!

Mr. Ellman, from Sussex, gave a very similar account of the state of farmers in his district. His own farm had been taken on lease in 1790 at 680*l.* rent, retaken in 1811 at 1,200*l.*, and reduced in 1815 to 1,000*l.*, at which it then continued. Mr. Ellman was a great and successful sheep breeder, and did not assert that his own occupation was not profitable. But he was agent for a large estate, whereon the abatements had been from 20 to 25 per cent., and even as much as 35 per cent. then very lately, on farms taken during the highest prices. The greatest sufferers were on the heavy tillage land. He thought the farmers could pay no rent, except on down farms *where they keep more stock*; that farmers who had commenced within

ten years, *with little capital*, must give up their farms. That green crops were getting less, and, for want of capital, farmers were falling back upon the antiquated system of naked fallows. And Mr. Ellman cited a particular case which tells the same story. On one farm of a property he managed, the rent of which was 220*l.*, the tenant, four years before, “kept four or “six oxen, six or eight young growing up stock that he “bred to come into work, and generally four cows. I “found,” said Mr. E., “the other day, all the young “stock gone, all the oxen gone, and he had only three “cows; and had taken in four or five horses, which I “saw in the yard treading down the straw, instead of “the oxen and young stock.” Can such be the benefits the legislature promised to the agriculturists in giving them, on paper, a close monopoly? Mr. Ellman showed, though with a different purpose, that the then corn law—and every subsequent corn law has done the same—induced the speculator in corn to prefer foreign grain to native, thereby preventing operations, which, in a natural state of trade, would somewhat counteract the depression of price in very abundant seasons. He being asked, “A man buying bonded “corn at 46*s.* has no probability of selling it till it rises “to 80*s.*; but another person buying free corn at 50*s.* “or 60*s.* may sell it whenever he pleases?” replied—*“The precariousness of the seasons in this country is “such, that we usually have, once in about three or four “years, a very defective crop*, when, if the price does “not rise to nearly or quite 80*s.* a quarter, it is totally “impossible that a farmer, under those circumstances, “can be remunerated: so the speculators in corn “(those who have got money at command) will not

“purchase, under those circumstances, British corn at “60s. if they can buy foreign corn, though under bond, “at 40s., though the one is free, and the other under “bond at the time.” As regards the last forty-five years Mr. Ellman’s remark upon the seasons is perfectly just, and the effect of any system, by which the price of corn in this country is kept permanently above the continental level, must have the effect he stated of attracting speculation in cheap years to foreign in preference to British grain. And, in a different part of his evidence, he has stated as a fact, that a part of the then heaviness of the country markets was occasioned by the dealers buying “less for storing up,” although they were buying more for consumption. In further confirmation of the improved condition of the labouring many, Mr. Ellman stated, that he was giving his own men 2s. 2d. a day, notwithstanding the low price of corn.

Another witness, Mr. Rodwell, a farmer and land-agent in Suffolk, gave a similar account of the deterioration which had been going on in the husbandry of that county since 1814. He said there was not then a tenth part of the beasts fattening upon corn and oil-cake there had been a few years before; a fact, which to the farmer is in itself a history of misfortune. The rents were, in many instances, two years in arrear, and “*no abatements of rent would enable many of the then present tenants to go on.*” This is an exemplification of what Mr. Hanning found on the western side of England, viz. “that it was of no use to make abatements of rent to poor tenants.” Witness after witness stated, that the poverty of the tenants arose either from having originally taken their land without the necessary capital, speculating upon exorbitant prices, or

from their capital having been absorbed in payments of rent calculated on a *minimum* price for wheat of 10s. a bushel. And, be it observed, no change of system had been adopted by the tenants to meet the alteration of times, except in those numerous cases where they were lessening their green crops, selling their oxen and young stock, and abandoning the fattening of beasts; changes which at once indicated and accelerated approaching ruin. Neither landlord nor tenant seemed to have a conception that rent was to be made in any way but by the accustomed growth of corn, and a great breadth of grain culture, which, though it might have answered under the high prices of 1811 and 1812, *and for a brief period*, could never be permanently sustained. And in such a state of things reductions of rents were literally useless, for in a great portion of the inferior soils the landlord might have given up *all* his rent, and the tenant sunk the whole of his capital in the hopeless attempt to farm under a fallacious system of ideal monopoly. A great many calculations were delivered in by various witnesses, intended to prove, that at the then low price *wheat could not be grown at a profit, even if no rent was paid*. Most of these calculations came from the occupiers of heavy tillage land, or poor clay soils, and they all assumed, as the basis of their estimates, the actual system and the accustomed expenses: where they did grow fallow crops at all, they looked at them with a half grudging eye as an expensive preparation for a grain crop; and, in some instances, where admission was made of a return from the sheep, no other account of it was given than a small price per acre put upon the turnips. Where, however, such calculations were most confidently made, few if any turnips were grown; fallow, wheat, clover, wheat

and beans, being the ordinary rotation adopted. Experience has now clearly shown, that except in extraordinary circumstances such a course cannot pay.

The statements made of the rents actually paid, showed that, as compared with 1792, the amount of rent still marked the advanced value of land, though in a few instances loose statements were offered of rents which had been one-third higher in 1814, as compared with 1792, and that a full third had since been abated. Such accounts were in general vaguely given, and invariably referred to poor clay land, to which the observations on the necessity for a change of system, with altered prices, most forcibly apply. When figures were given, a great increase was always the result. For instance, besides those alluded to in the foregoing evidence, Mr. Rodwell mentioned, that in 1796 he had taken the farm on which he resided, on a fourteen years' lease at 300*l.* — the previous occupier having paid at the rate of about 160*l.* — that he renewed his lease in 1811, when the rent was advanced to 500*l.*; and he observed, that at its expiration, which would be Michaelmas, 1822, "there ought to be" an abatement of 25 per cent. Now, though I will answer for it Mr. Rodwell renewed his lease in 1822 with a far less abatement than 25 per cent., yet taking it at that rate, there would still remain a rent of 375*l.* to be compared with 160*l.* in 1792. And one fact stated by Mr. Rodwell, and indeed by several other witnesses, has a most important bearing upon the amount of rent, which was, that in 1821, 2,000*l.* was as good a capital for stocking a farm, as 3,000*l.* would have been in the dear year of 1817. The smaller the amount of capital which can be employed upon a farm for its advantageous cultivation, the

larger in general will be the rent certainly the larger proportional rent paid to the landlord, besides affording a greater number of competitors. This is fully borne out by the comparatively high rent paid for permanent pasture land, which requires less capital than an arable farm; and again, by the enormous price paid for hay-farms within reach of the metropolis, which are well and profitably managed with a less outlay of capital than any other description of land*.

Mr. Custance, a London land-agent largely employed, spoke of two particular farms under his care; one of which had been let on lease in 1796, at 248*l.* a year, relet in 1810, at 339*l.*, and again in 1817, at 522*l.*; but great improvements in the last interval had been made, by or with the aid of the lessor. The farm was still (in 1821) held at the same price. The other was let also in 1796, at 341*l.*; relet in 1812 (the year of highest prices), at 768*l.*; and relet again in 1819, at the reduced rent of 674*l.* Now this I apprehend to have been very much such an alteration of rent, as would represent the average reduction upon well tenanted farms throughout England.

Before quitting the evidence of 1821, I must refer to the testimony of Mr. Maugham, a gentleman much engaged as a land-agent in Wales, which strikingly

* I make this remark, taking the state of English agriculture as I find it disclosed by the committees of 1821 and 1833, the general accuracy of which my own personal observation has confirmed, and without reference to the question whether or not the system of convertible husbandry, which has been so successfully in operation in Scotland, is the best course for both landlord and tenant in England. To that part of the subject I shall address myself, after tracing the actual operations of the corn laws on agriculture down to the present day.

confirms my observation with respect to the higher rent of permanent pasture; he said, that rents were very well paid in Wales, and had been but little reduced, which he attributed to the less extent of tillage in Wales, and to the tenants, generally men of small capital, looking to the breeding of stock upon permanent pasture for the means of payment of rent. Now, whatever might have been done by an instructed farmer with large means and the experience of the last twenty-five years, there can be no doubt that the Welch tenant, with Welch means and appliances only, was able to pay a higher rent to his landlord during the period from 1814 to 1821, from his farm having remained chiefly in permanent pasture, than he could have done, had it been converted *by him* into tillage under the stimulus of the prices of 1812.

That an early and prompt adjustment of rents to the altered circumstances of the times was felt, in 1821, by some of the most observant and intelligent persons conversant with landed property to be the true interest of the owner no less than the tenant of the soil, appears by a letter from Mr. Loch to Sir John Sinclair, dated in May of that year, from which I extract the following pertinent passages.

“The present distress* of the agricultural interest
 “*is permanent*, and one which, in as far as tenants
 “are concerned, can only be met by a reduction
 “on the part of the landlords, in such proportion as
 “the amount of their respective rents may require.

* The writer seems here to have used the word “distress” as synonymous with low prices, and at that time those terms were almost universally deemed identical.

“ I am fully aware that such a measure is one which
 “ will not be generally agreeable to the great body of
 “ landlords, and to many it may not be possible. Of
 “ this, however, there can be no doubt, that the sooner
 “ they adopt the resolution the better will it be for
 “ themselves, their tenants, and the country. If they
 “ delay it the tenants will exhaust their capital, *already*
 “ *nearly gone, by the payment of the last years’ rents.*
 “ How can it be expected, *but that under the pressure*
 “ *of such circumstances, that they will not bear heavy on*
 “ *their farms.* The result must be the ruin of the
 “ tenantry and the land. The sooner, therefore, the
 “ landlord can make up his mind to this measure, *the*
 “ *richer he will ultimately be in securing a respectable*
 “ *tenantry and preserving the condition of his land.*
 “ And to a certain extent, the effect of this measure
 “ would be less serious to the landlord than at first
 “ sight it appears to be, for the amount of his income
 “ will in a certain degree remain the same, though the
 “ nominal amount be altered, as he can now purchase
 “ most articles of food and raiment much cheaper than
 “ he did*. One class of losses to which the farmer
 “ was subjected is at an end, his having been obliged
 “ to sell cheap what he bought dear, and generally at
 “ a loss. Every thing having now fallen, he may buy
 “ at such a rate as to give him a fair profit, *provided*
 “ *his rent is such as not to run away with it.*”

To very much the same purpose writes the late
 Mr. T. G. Bramston, at one time member for the county
 of Essex, and father, I believe, of the gentleman of that

* How much more strongly does this observation apply in this
 year 1843 to clothing and other articles of domestic and personal
 convenience.

name who now sits for South Essex, in a tract published in 1822, and to which my attention was directed by a friend well known in that county*; it is entitled "A practical inquiry into the Nature and Extent of the present Agricultural Distress, and the means of relieving it." He says, "Parliament may administer palliations; but the landed interest must place its chief dependence upon itself; upon the combined efforts of landlord and tenant; upon their cordial co-operation with each other." What was the currency question, the extent of its former depreciation, or the proper time of its restoration, to the farmer. "The deed is done, and ought not to be recalled; the measure is pregnant with future good; but let the farmer live to see it; let him not be overwhelmed with present evils; he is as willing to pay, and as well prepared to pay *in produce* as ever." Mr. Bramston then alludes to the imperative obligation to sell upon any terms which an arrear of rent, or a high money rent, imposed on the farmer, as one of the causes of the great depression of prices. This is a cause frequently mentioned by the witnesses of 1821, and it shows how much the occupier is injured by those fluctuations of price which derange the value of land, and set at nought all power of calculating rent. He then puts the "case of an occupier at a rent of 100%, set under the supposition that wheat was to maintain the price of 80s. per quarter,"

* D. W. Harvey, Esq. The pamphlet alluded to is a very sensible one, and though I differ from the conclusions of the writer who advocated protection, I was never more convinced, than when reading it, of the impolicy of that line of free trade advocacy, which would mix it up with party politics. The late Mr. Bramston was a supporter of Mr. Canning.

whose "gross receipts were to be equal to four
 "rents, or 400*l.* The reduction of price from 80*s.* to
 "54*s.* (the price of 1821) must at once subtract 32½
 "per cent. from the gross returns of his farm, reducing
 "them to 270*l.*;" and this probably, *the mode of cultivation remaining the same*, is not very far from the
 practical operation of the law of 1815; for we have
 seen, that the gross receipts of Mr. R. C. Harvey*, in
 Norfolk, were upon an average of three years ending
 in 1819, during which time the price of wheat ap-
 proached the nominal parliamentary *minimum* of 80*s.* a
 quarter, amounted yearly to 6,860*l.*, while the average
 yearly receipts of the three low priced years, ending in
 1816, was only 3,984*l.*

The action of such a system on the small farmer is
 described with full knowledge of the class. "A farmer
 "of this class possesses no property but the stock upon
 "his farm; he makes no calculations, he sets apart no
 "specific portion of the produce for payment of
 "interest of the sum invested on his farm, or for the
 "maintenance of himself and his family; but he lives
 "hard, and the means of a hard subsistence are neces-
 "sarily taken from the produce of the farm as they are
 "wanted; for they can by possibility be derived from
 "no other source." And the protecting duty would leave
 this man, *even if no rent was paid*, 130*l.* in debt. Then
 the larger farmer, though he may have made money in
 the time of high prices, was, in truth, in little better
 position. Admitting some of such farmers were to be
 met with, Mr. Bramston says, "And even, in these
 "cases, if the investigation were to be pursued, it

* Ante, p. 60.

“ would probably be found, that the accumulations of
 “ better days are at this time rarely available. They
 “ have been devoted perhaps to the education and ad-
 “ vancement of a son to a higher walk in life ; to the
 “ establishment of sons in business, or daughters in
 “ marriage ; to the purchase of a farm, or the erection
 “ of a house.” By some, such gains were expended in
 the improvement of the farm, by others in more “ costly
 “ diet, clothes, and furniture, and in a more free enjoy-
 “ ment of the amusements and pleasures of life.” This is
 strictly true. I have often heard observations from land-
 lords and agents upon the mode and style in which
 their tenants had lived, who came, during the low prices
 of 1822 and 1832, to ask for abatements in rent, and
 sometimes there was doubtless much justice in such re-
 marks ; but it must be remembered that farmers only in-
 creased their expenditure during the war, in common
 with all others, who were benefiting as they were from
 high prices.

As an illustration of the power of accumulation
 within the reach of non-speculating farmers, during
 the high prices from 1793 to 1814, I would instance
 three gentlemen, brothers, each of whom occupied
 as tenant, during the whole of that period, a large
 upland farm—perhaps of 1500 or 2000 acres—in that
 wide, open district of Wiltshire, known as Salisbury
 Plain. Each started in life with about sufficient capital
 for advantageously carrying on his business ; but,
 I believe, without other property. They all lived
 respectably and quietly, occupying the rank and having
 the establishments of gentlemen ; but they entered into
 no speculations, they bought no land, I am not aware
 that either of them ever added to his occupation any

other land than the farm or farms with which he originally commenced, and they regularly invested their savings in public securities. They all acted rigidly upon Shakspeare's precept, "Neither a lender nor a borrower be." Two of them are now dead; and they both left behind them very large fortunes, very far beyond the amount which those who had known the even tenor of their way had thought possible, though they were always believed to be men of considerable wealth. The other is still living, and there is every reason for thinking him no less wealthy than his deceased brothers. It is true, the farms these gentlemen occupied must have required considerable capitals; consisting of light soil, which will grow heavy crops of wheat and barley, provided it is kept in good condition, and which, in that district, is effected by means of large breeding flocks of sheep, for whose sustenance good turnips are indispensable. In this district, the adage of the Flemish farmer, "No corn without manure, no manure without cattle, no cattle without roots," with the substitution of sheep for cattle, has always been an article of agricultural faith.

To return to Mr. Bramston's tract, where he says the landlord ought to make an abatement to the tenant in strict conformity to the difference between the real price of wheat and that promised by the corn law. Whatever may have been the case then, I do not think that any such scale will meet the necessity of the present day; but rents must, to use an expression of Mr. Bramston's, "undergo the process of recomposition." Rent must be calculated upon a reasonable estimate of the whole produce of the farm. Tenants have suffered enough, and landlords also, though in a less degree,

from the law which induces the farmer (to use a common proverb) "to place all his eggs in one basket." In 1822, the price of cattle, as well as the price of corn, was so low as to furnish an additional cause of agricultural distress. The evidence of the witnesses of 1821 showed, that under the pressure of high rents and other unadjusted burthens, the farmers were rapidly decreasing their stock of cattle, in oxen and young stock as stated in Sussex, and in fat bullocks in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cambridge, and thus the markets became overdone. It appears that the number of neat cattle sold in each of the two years (1821 and 1822) exceeded by nearly ten thousand the number sold in the years 1819 and 1820 respectively, and the excess of sheep in the two latter years was in even a greater proportion. The same comparative increase occurred at Liverpool, Hull, and other great markets in England. This would sufficiently account for the low price of meat, and mark the deteriorating influence upon agriculture of the law then in operation. Though not within the immediate scope of this tract, I may mention that, under the influence of a section of the agriculturists, the government of the day was, in 1822, induced to consent to a measure for issuing four millions of exchequer bills in loans to parishes, and for the promotion of public works, and to a postponement of the abolition of the small notes' circulation. Both were intended by those who urged them to cause a nominal rise of prices by increasing the currency, and both failed in effecting the intended object.

Throughout the year 1822, prices of grain continued to fall lower than in the preceding year; so much so, that the average price of wheat in the last three months

of that year was only a fraction above 38*s.* a quarter; not half the *minimum* price promised by the corn law! This low average was, however, in a considerable degree, attributable to the very inferior quality of the wheat of 1821. That of 1822 was of good quality, and, in the beginning of the year 1823, it began to raise the average, which, in January, was 40*s.* 8*d.*; and from thenceforth, chiefly from the unpromising weather, wheat continued to rise, until in June the average was 62*s.* 5*d.* Though the harvest was wet, the price declined to 46*s.* 5*d.* in October, rising again to 50*s.* 8*d.* in December. The fluctuations of this year were entirely to be ascribed to varying expectations entertained of the harvest, and calculations of the stocks in hand. In January, 1824, it was found, that the crop of the previous harvest had been deficient in quantity and of bad quality; hence the average price rose to 59*s.* 8*d.*, and in the next month to 65*s.* 10*d.* This advance in price brought forward larger quantities than were expected; so that the market price of wheat dropped to 55*s.* 4*d.* in September of 1824. The harvest of that year was wet; the average rose in December 63*s.* 6*d.*, and the stock in hand becoming reduced, a further advance to 67*s.* 6*d.* occurred in the spring of 1825. Now the feeling of indignation against the corn law ripened into a decisive agitation, and it was sufficiently strong to induce the government to admit, in April, 1825, 525,231 quarters of foreign wheat for home consumption, at a duty of 10*s.* a quarter. Yet this only prevented a rise; for the average price of wheat remained at about 68*s.* the quarter until the commencement of harvest, which proving productive, the average declined, though slowly, to 63*s.* in December, 1825.

This was the autumn of the well-remembered panic, the result of previous extravagant speculations, and wheat, possibly partaking of the universal depression of the period, fell from an average of 60*s.* in January, to 55*s.* 6*d.* in March, 1826. Part of this fall might have happened from the belief that the government would again liberate bonded wheat; for, on a declaration having been made by ministers in Parliament, that there was no intention of admitting the wheat then in bond, the average rose again in April to 60*s.*

Public opinion was, however, too strong to permit the government to persist in that course; for the manufacturing population was in great distress, and from the aspect of the weather and the appearance of the crops, a further advance was apprehended, so that in May, 1826, all the corn then in bond was released. Ministers also proposed to be invested with the power of admitting 500,000 quarters more during the recess in the event of a deficient harvest, and at the same time an alteration of the corn laws, involving some relaxation of the prohibitory part of the system, was announced for the next session. The summer of this year was remarkably dry, and the crops were secured early and in good condition; all, however, except the wheat crop, being greatly deficient. Under an order in council, in September, foreign oats were admitted at a duty of 2*s.* a quarter, and rye, beans, and peas at 3*s.* 6*d.* The average for wheat in December, 1826, was 58*s.* 1*d.* In July, 1827, the price again rose to 60*s.* The wheat crop was a full average, but the grain not of first rate quality; and soon after harvest, 572,733 quarters of wheat and flour were admitted at a 20*s.* duty. The average then fell to 49*s.* the quarter by the end of the year. This brings me to

the corn law of 1828, a most important change of system, under which the trade in grain was regulated up to Sir Robert Peel's act of 1842. It will have been seen, from the foregoing survey of the state of the corn markets since 1822, that, notwithstanding the complaints of agricultural distress, a distress sufficiently real, and notwithstanding the vast influence of the landed interest in Parliament, after the fearful years of 1816 and 1817, government never dared to permit the rigid enforcement of the corn law, when the state of the home crops would have given the agriculturist the prices promised by that law. The admission of foreign grain into consumption, which took place in 1825, 1826, and 1827, was a virtual abrogation of the law of 1815; a tacit confession that the monopoly thereby promised could not be enforced.

It was in contemplation of the alteration of the corn law proposed by Mr. Canning in 1827, and afterwards in preparation for the act of 1828, that the two missions of Mr. Jacob to the corn growing countries of Europe, in 1825 and 1827, were undertaken, and which produced his valuable reports on the trade in corn and the agriculture of the North of Europe of 1826 and 1828. It would swell this tract too much to go into any detailed examination of those reports, but it is necessary to state the general effect of them, for the purpose of correcting the extravagant and exaggerated estimates of the quantity of corn which, under a free trade in grain, might be drawn from those countries, and of the low price at which it could there be produced. With the exception of part of Poland, immediately in the neighbourhood of Cracow, the soil of the vast districts of Northern Europe, which we are accustomed to con-

sider corn growing countries, is by no means of such high natural fertility as has been represented ; and it has everywhere been cropped to the fullest extent the capital of its inhabitants will permit. Indeed, all the land in these countries has been over-cropped, and the owners have not the capital which would be necessary to restore it by keeping stock. Besides, the climate effectually prevents that system of green cropping which is so successful in all the improved districts of Britain. The winters are extremely long and severe, so much so that winter tares cannot be grown ; and the summers, again, are usually so hot and dry, that turnips as often fail as succeed, and spring tares do not produce enough green food to make them worth growing. Mr. Jacob mentions a noble proprietor in Mecklenburg, of great intelligence, who resided for some time in the best cultivated districts of Scotland, for the express purpose of learning the most approved system of husbandry, in the belief that the Scotch farming would be peculiarly applicable to the soil and climate of his own estate. He adopted all the Scotch plans, and persevered for many years with great energy ; but, though he obtained a larger produce than his neighbours, the green crops, upon which he necessarily depended to keep the large stock of cattle improved husbandry requires, so frequently failed, either from the severity of winter or the heat and drought of summer, that he finally let his estate according to ordinary terms of the country. Here the climate seems to limit the produce most effectually, for if even the cultivators had the capital (which they have not) wanted to restore to the land the amount of manure that would completely renovate it, the climate would interfere with their operations. The most improved course of cropping in

use, is first a year's fallow followed by three crops of corn in succession ; then grass, mown one year and pastured for two ; in general the rotation is far more scourging than this. The acreable return under such a system is necessarily very small : for instance, in the Prussian dominions it is calculated, that the average increase of the four kinds of grain, *viz.* wheat, rye, barley, and oats, taken together, is not more than four times the seed sown, and not one-fourth of the neat stock and sheep to the same extent of land is kept, as will be found in this country, which fully accounts for the very low standard of fertility. Nor is the circumstance immaterial that Poland, the country upon the whole of the greatest natural fertility, has for nearly two centuries largely exported grain, whilst nothing deserving of notice has been imported which could be converted into nutriment to the soil. Mr. Jacob observes, "the system of rotation by which two crops of corn are raised in succession, and nothing is administered to refresh the land but a fallow (and that is the Polish system), would exhaust the best soil with which we are acquainted. In every part of my journey through Poland, the impression communicated, in looking at the fields, whether with growing crops, in stubble, or under the operations of the plough, was, that they were approaching to a state of exhaustion from excessive cropping." And this was confirmed by the statistical facts. In the eleven years, ending with 1805, the annual average exports of wheat, from the mouths of the Vistula, were 438,263 quarters ; in the eleven years, ending with 1825, the exports from the same ports were only 151,729 quarters a year.

Many parts of the North of Africa, and of Asia Minor, which formerly supplied large quantities of

corn to Europe, have since become deserts; and, as the first report justly remarks, "one of the chief causes of the progress we have made in agriculture, and of the superior productiveness of our fields, has arisen from our exporting but few, and importing many of those articles which are capable, when decomposed, of becoming manure."

In his second report, Mr. Jacob fully confirms the opinions he expressed in his first. One serious impediment to profitable exportation of corn from Hanover, Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Holstein, and the rest of the Danish provinces, and, in fact, throughout the corn countries of the Continent, is to be found in the state of their roads, which are completely in a state of nature, impassable in wet weather, and rough, heavy, and difficult at all times. Some of the best wheat lands are forty and fifty miles from their shipping port, and much of the wheat at Hamburgh is sent there sixty miles by land carriage. The following statement of marketing expenses would surprise an English farmer, who sends a load of wheat, weighing 4,800lbs., with two or three, or at most four horses. In Mecklenburg, a most intelligent proprietor stated, that he sent his corn twenty-four miles to Rostock by a four-horse waggon, which, from the badness of the roads, can only draw 2,400lbs. in weight, or half an English load; and from this he must subtract 180lbs., the weight of three and a half bushels of corn, carried for the subsistence of the cattle on the journey. Forty-one and a half bushels of wheat only are sent at once, and selling at 3s. a bushel will produce the sum of 124s. 6d., from which, after 4s. 8d. money expenses, and 10s. 6d. horse provender, making together 15s. 2d., shall have been

deducted, will leave the sum of 109*s.* 4*d.* only as the net produce of a waggon-load of wheat. At a distance of forty-eight miles, only thirty-eight bushels could be sent, besides the cattle provender, which would cause an expense of 30*s.* 4*d.* to be deducted from the gross sale of 114*s.*, leaving only 84*s.* 8*d.* net. On rye the expense of carriage is 13 per cent. I remember a friend in the west of England, whose farm was twelve or thirteen miles from his market town, though the road was an excellent turnpike, complaining of the distance for sending his corn as a serious drawback on the value of his property. How would he like to farm on the shores of the Baltic? Mr. Jacob, after mentioning that the English demand for oats, which I have mentioned as having occurred in the autumn of 1826, had quite cleared the Continent of that grain, so much so that the price, in the summer of 1827, was doubled, says, that it is "only when export has been repressed by " restrictions that any quantity has ever been furnished " deserving of notice." And, in reference to Friesland, the land of oats, he says, "From the circumstances of " the yeomanry many can keep their corn in years of " low price, and most feel a pride in doing so; and " though in small portions in the hands of individuals, " yet when it has been pent up by our restrictive laws " for several years, they can pour in such a quantity as " is large for so small a country, though but a mere " trifle in comparison with our regular consumption." And the remark applies with equal force to wheat, which is produced almost exclusively for exportation; the occasional opening of the English market, and the *consequently sudden and high-priced demand* being the

prize for which the foreign corn merchant is constantly watching. Now, the testimony of Mr. Jacob's reports, and the internal evidence of their accuracy is most satisfactory, completely negatives the possibility of any greatly increased produce of wheat in Northern Europe, except at such an increased cost of production as would put all competition with wheat of our own growth out of the question. But, admitting some increase might take place, yet if it could be brought month by month into our market, in the ordinary course of commercial dealings, without accumulating in such quantities, its effect on our own prices would be comparatively trifling, whilst the consumer would buy corn at a lower rate than under our restrictive system. It would injure the British grower less and benefit the British consumer more than the large quantity of foreign wheat now occasionally introduced in a mass.

The idea, that we exclude foreign wheat by our corn laws, is a mere delusion : we do receive it, and we receive as much, probably more, under the sort of periodical panic in which the importation occurs, as would be imported under a permanently open trade.

Mr. Jacob, in his second report, says, " At the then present harvest of 1827 it is doubtful if ten days' consumption of wheat could have been drawn from the whole Continent, even at an advance of 100 per cent. on the prices of the period." The reader will remember, that at the period of his visit, which was in the summer of 1827, the continental markets had been cleared by our admissions of foreign wheat in 1825, 1826, and 1827.

Independently of exaggerated statements of the productiveness of the corn growing countries of Europe;

made by the friends to a protective system in this country, the appearance of the homestead about a continental farm is such as to give casual observers an erroneous idea of its produce. The house and buildings are enormously large, from the necessity which exists of boarding a great many of the peasants in the farmer's dwelling, and of housing, during a long winter varying from five to seven months, all the cattle, sheep, and live stock of every kind kept on the farm. So indispensable are these buildings, that without them the land itself would be of no value whatever; and, of the whole value of a property, full one-third consists of its buildings. These are, moreover, very expensive to keep up, and the annual outlay for that purpose forms an important item in the cost of production. This expense is incident to the climate; and, perhaps, many readers will remember, that in the account of an agricultural tour in Canada and the United States, made not long ago by that eminent agriculturist Colonel Barclay Allardyce, the want of buildings to shelter the cattle, and the difficulty of growing green crops, where the alternations from cold to heat were so extreme, are mentioned as the chief obstacles to improved husbandry in those countries. There, the as yet unexhausted vegetable soil, the accumulation of innumerable ages, and the illimitable outlet of the "far west," prevent agricultural improvements from being of absolute necessity. Not so on the continent of Europe, where the exhausting process has been going on for centuries, and any large addition to the growth of corn must be had at an increased ratio of cost, which a demand, fifty times as intense as any this country could occasion, would never repay. Though corn might, to some extent, under a con-

stantly open trade, be brought to England from other countries, wherein the soil and the climate render its cost of production far less than in the north of Europe, yet the expense of transporting so bulky an article as corn, and its liability to be heated and impaired in a voyage of any duration would be fully equivalent to the smaller cost price. That cause will ever make the prices of European markets for grain those which will regulate our own. Mr. Tooke, who has always traded largely in the products of the north of Europe, also stated in evidence before the committee of 1821, that very exaggerated views of the cheapness of corn upon the Continent were entertained from casual and temporary circumstances: and he mentioned, that the harvests in Germany, the Netherlands, and the north of France, of 1818 and 1819, were even more abundant than those of the same years in this country. Indeed, all accounts of the foreign corn trade, upon which any reliance can be placed, tend to prove, that the *annual* amount of surplus corn which can be profitably brought to this country is comparatively small, and that all the statements which have been made to the contrary, as for instance, that of Lord Stanley, that 38,000,000 of quarters of wheat could be grown in the Russian province of Tamboff, originated in misapprehension or mistake.

SECTION III.

STATE OF AGRICULTURE AND THE CORN TRADE FROM 1828 TO 1842.

FROM 1828 a new era in our corn law legislation commences; absolute monopoly was professedly abandoned by the landed interest, and, in lieu thereof, a shifting scale of duties was adopted, which, according to the declared intentions of its framers, was to secure to the British grower a price ranging between 65*s.* and 70*s.* a quarter for wheat, and other grain in the same proportion, and to protect the British consumer from the effect of any scarcity which should raise the price of wheat beyond about 72*s.* a quarter. In passing I must remark, that the *average* price of wheat has never attained to 72*s.* a quarter in this country, except when the crops of grain here have been exceedingly deficient, and no relief by foreign supply, arising either from peculiar circumstances or prohibitory law, could be obtained. However, the declared object of the promoters of the late corn law was, to strike what they designated a fair balance between protection to the British grower, and dearth to the consumer of corn in this country. The mode of carrying out their object was this: weekly returns of the corn sold were directed to be made from all the principal corn markets of England and Wales, from which a weekly average was to be made up, and at the end of every six weeks an average

of the prices of the whole preceding period was again to be made up and published; which six weeks' average regulated the import duties on grain *. When the average price of wheat, ascertained as above mentioned, should be 62*s.* and under 63*s.* a quarter, the import duty was declared to be 24*s.* 8*d.*; and for every shilling the average price fell below 62*s.* a quarter, the duty increased 1*s.* also: thus, when the average price should be 40*s.* a quarter — which had happened before, and has occurred since, the passing of the law now under review — the import duty on a quarter of foreign wheat amounted to 46*s.* 8*d.* Now, as a duty of 24*s.* 8*d.* on wheat at 62*s.* a quarter was clearly a prohibitory one, it is impossible not to coincide with the Lincolnshire member of Parliament, an ardent advocate of protection, who on a recent occasion said, “the landed interest incurred a great deal “of superfluous odium through this scale of duties.” On the other hand I must say, they assumed to themselves, and perhaps for a time received, a very superabundant measure of credit for tenderness towards the consumer, as having, by the act of 1828, substantially relaxed the system of restriction enacted by the law of 1815: and, as the average price ascended 1*s.* the quarter, the duty descended at the same rate, until the price

* I have not loaded this Tract with references to other corn than wheat, unless where there happened to be any peculiar circumstances applicable to other kinds of grain; both because I assume, from the ample discussions which have taken place in the last two years upon the corn law question, and from the very accessible forms in which the chief statistics on that subject have been published, that there are very few readers unacquainted with the provisions of the act of 1828.

was 67*s.*, and then the duty came down two shillings for every shilling the average price rose; then again, at the average of 69*s.* the duty was 13*s.* 8*d.*; at 70*s.* the duty was 10*s.* 8*d.*; at 71*s.* price, a fall to 6*s.* 8*d.* took place in the duty; at the price of 72*s.* duty fell again to 2*s.* 8*d.*, and at 73*s.* to a 1*s.* duty.

It is plain from an inspection of this scale, that its framers intended the duty to be absolutely prohibitory until the average price reached 70*s.* a quarter, and in that respect their calculations have proved accurate, for no imports—none I mean in a commercial sense, as possibly a few accidental parcels may have paid the higher duties—have occurred at duties averaging altogether in any one year so high as 10*s.* 8*d.*; and in only one year, since 1828, has the average rate of duty paid amounted to 6*s.* 8*d.* The effect, also, of the manner in which the averages were taken under the act of 1828, was to produce a somewhat lower, though perhaps statistically a more accurate average than was obtained under the former law, several smaller and more remote market towns being included in the list of places from whence returns were directed; and the requirement of a high *average* price during six weeks to regulate the duty necessarily implies a considerable period of previous high prices. The average, as taken under the law of 1828, is estimated to be 5*s.* a quarter of wheat lower than under the former plan.

The difficulties this sliding scale of duties imposed upon the importing merchant, by introducing a new element of uncertainty into the corn trade, are obvious. Thus it has been said, “ Suppose a merchant commissions a cargo of wheat when the price is at 71*s.* a quarter, in the event of the price declining only 3*s.*

“ or to 68*s.*, the duty will rise from 6*s.* 8*d.* to 16*s.* 8*d.* ;
 “ so that if the merchant brings the grain to market, he
 “ will realise 13*s.* 8*d.* a quarter less than he expected,
 “ and 10*s.* less than he would have done had there
 “ been no duty*.” On the other hand, if the average
 price had risen and the duty fallen, the importer would
 reap a profit beyond his calculations. Inasmuch as
 the merchant usually calculates on a fair profit, the in-
 creased chances of hazard or gain were likely only to
 lead to reckless and over speculation in the corn trade
 in seasons of apprehended scarcity. And such has
 been the invariable operation of the sliding duties.
 Again, the scale offered irresistible inducement to the
 speculators in corn to withhold their supplies until the
 last moment, in the hope of catching the lowest outlet
 in the “ trap,” and as this was sure to happen just on
 the eve of harvest, when the stocks in farmers’ hands be-
 ing most reduced the price is highest, a large supply of
 foreign corn, as might be expected, always came upon
 the market in a mass, and entered into competition
 with the new crop of the home grower, when from the
 quantity of British corn on sale the market is weakest.
 The imports thus suddenly made are seldom nicely
 calculated to the wants of the consumers, being gene-
 rally in excess, and the necessities of a great body of
 farmers compelling them to come into the market,
 let the price be high or low, an unnatural fall of prices
 is occasioned, to the serious detriment of a large por-
 tion of the agriculturalists : and it is notorious that the
 consumer never benefits by such temporary falls in prices
 as are thus occasioned. Such were the impressions

* M'Culloch's Commercial Dictionary—article, Corn Laws and Corn Trade, p. 426.

entertained of the effect of this scheme from the first by all who reasoned upon general principles, and every succeeding season has since served to bring it more and more into disfavour with practical men.

The harvest of 1828 was of a varied character; being wet in the earlier portion of the time, the grain in the more forward districts of the east and south of England was carried in bad condition, but the weather having cleared up about the middle of August, all the corn of the northern parts of the island was secured in good condition. The markets quickly rose after harvest, so that the ports became open to foreign wheat at the lowest duty of 1*s.* a quarter, the average price in November having reached 75*s.* 3*d.* The quantity of foreign wheat then imported was 842,000 quarters, which paid the average duty of 1*s.* 9½*d.* per quarter. There was at the same time a great increase of the imports from Ireland, being 157,349 quarters of wheat and 279,938 cwt. of flour, beyond the importation of the year 1827; the crops too proved less deficient than was anticipated, the surplus of the old stock was larger than had been calculated on, and the foreign importation above mentioned had occurred. These things operating together produced a fall in the average to 64*s.* 7*d.* in July of 1829, and the crops of that year were deficient and badly got in. The farmers, fearful as to the operation of the new law, hurried their damp and inferior corn to market, which depressed the average price at the close of the year to 55*s.* Throughout January and February of 1830, the major part of the British corn brought to market sold under 50*s.* a quarter, but the small portion which came in dry condition fetched from 70*s.* to 75*s.*, whilst fine foreign

was worth 80s. a quarter. This was a time of severe distress to the occupiers of heavy clay lands, the crops of which were not only deficient in quantity and of low quality, but had been got in at a very heavy expense. The total quantity of foreign wheat imported in 1829 was 1,364,000 quarters, which paid the average duty of 9s. 2½d. per quarter.

The winter of 1829-30 was severe, and in the spring so manifest had become the deficiency of the previous harvest, that about 300,000 quarters of foreign wheat were entered for consumption at the high duty of 20s. 8d. a quarter. This importation was in some measure rendered necessary from the dampness of the home-grown wheat requiring a large admixture of better grain before it could be made into flour; for since 1816 there had been no crop so low in quality as that of 1828. The summer of 1830 proved unsettled, and produced as its usual consequence a good deal of speculation upon the forthcoming harvest; prices rose so much, that in August the average reached 72s., and all the wheat and flour that was in bond or had newly arrived, amounting altogether to 1,400,000 quarters, was entered for home consumption at the low duty of 2s. 8d. a quarter. This immediately lowered the market to 61s. 7d. in October; but an opinion having prevailed that the crop of 1830 was decidedly below an average, the average rose again by March of 1831, to 73s. 5d. The total quantity of wheat imported in 1830 amounted to 1,702,000 quarters, at the average duty of 6s. 4½d.

It was in the autumn of 1830 and the succeeding winter, that very alarming riots broke out in the agricultural districts, which were in part occasioned by abuses of the poor law, as administered amongst the

rural population of the south and west of England, and were aggravated by the high prices of provisions, and the consequent complaints of insufficiency of wages. The errors and abuses which had existed in the poor law administration from the year 1794, the first rise of which is noted by Burke*, had, since 1814, increased with a fearful rapidity, and their injurious operation upon agriculture formed no inconsiderable part of the inquiries of the committee of 1821. The effects of the allowance system in deteriorating the condition, moral and physical, of the agricultural labourer, and its tendency to stimulate an unnatural increase of the rural population, had become more generally conspicuous in the interval between 1821 and 1831†. A systematic effort has since been made for the removal of these evils, which has been undoubtedly to a considerable extent successful; but the old poor law has left habits and feelings, both amongst the occupiers of land and the peasantry, which have had an evil influence upon English agriculture, and will require time for correction.

The winter of 1830-31 was variable, but the spring was remarkably cold, and it turned out at harvest

* Quoted ante, p. 15, 16.

† No one acquainted with the districts, where the allowance system prevailed, can doubt the effect of that system in stimulating a great proportionate increase of the rural population. I remember being present at a petty sessions in the west of England, when a labouring man brought in his son, a mere boy in appearance and manners, and on his behalf applied *for an allowance from the parish for the son's two children*. The magistrates, accustomed as they were to such things, could not forbear expressing their surprise at the youthful appearance of the young father of a family, and asked his age; his father replied, he was *nearly* nineteen, and had been married almost two years.

that the wheat crops had suffered from mildew and other diseases incident to a wet and cold summer. In Essex, and the heavy wheat soils near the metropolis, there was a general deficiency. No less than 1,491,000 quarters of foreign wheat had been admitted into consumption in the spring of this year, at an average duty of 4*s.* 8*d.*, under the speculative opinion that there would be a very general failure of the then growing crops. But the crops of the more distant districts not being so defective as had been anticipated, and the foreign importations having exceeded the effective demands of the market at the previous high rate, the average price went down by December, 1831, to 60*s.* 5*d.* In this year, as in the three preceding years, the average price by no means represented the real effect of the seasons upon the subsistence of the community, inasmuch as the averages were greatly reduced by the large portion of inferior grain which made its appearance in the markets.

The winter of 1831-32 was mild, and the spring not remarkably forward; but the summer was somewhat unsettled, which, in July and August, 1832, raised the average to 63*s.* August, however, was fine, and most of the crops of wheat south of Yorkshire were secured in good order. Some injury was afterwards caused by heavy rains, attended with a warm atmosphere; but, upon the whole, the harvest was well secured, and the yield generally abundant. Prices immediately fell, and the average in December, 1832, was as low as 53*s.* 7*d.* The average price of wheat during the five years ending in 1832 was 61*s.* 2*d.* per quarter, and in that period no less than 5,725,221 quarters of foreign and colonial wheat had been imported into this country. It is not therefore surprising that the committee of the

House of Commons, to whose report I shall presently refer, arrived somewhat unwillingly at the conclusion, that, to a certain extent, this country was habitually dependent upon importations for its supply of corn. In reference to this last cycle of five years, Mr. Tooke remarks, that the average deficiency of produce in this country was such, that had the same obstacles to importation existed, as prevailed during the five years ending in 1813, and if the 44*s.* a quarter, which those obstacles caused, had been added to the price of wheat during the war, the average, instead of 61*s.* 2*d.*, would have amounted to 105*s.* 2*d.*; or, taking the difference caused by the new plan of taking the averages at 5*s.* a quarter, to 110*s.* 2*d.* It must be also recollected that by 1832 the population had greatly increased. At the same time, it is probable there had been some increase of average productiveness caused by improved husbandry; for, as I shall have occasion to show, that notwithstanding the complaints of agricultural distress, which have been so regularly coincident with a good harvest since 1813, the practice of agriculture has been, upon the whole, steadily progressive since the peace.

The year 1833 was one of comparatively low prices (the average of wheat varying from about 51*s.* to 54*s.*), and its commencement was marked by a transition on the part of the bulk of the community from comparative dearth and stagnation to a condition of activity and abundance, and by loud complaints of agricultural distress. The distressed state of agriculture was alluded to in the speech upon the opening of Parliament, and a select committee was in consequence appointed to inquire into the subject.

I now come to the report of the select committee of the House of Commons in 1833, which plainly

proves what, in the opinion of the landed interest, was the condition of the agriculture of the kingdom at that period. After referring to the statements of the committee of 1821, that a considerable portion of the outgoings of the occupiers of arable farms could only be paid out of the capitals, and not from the profits of the tenantry, and "that the returns of farming capital were "at that time considerably below the ordinary rate of "profit," the report says, "and no evidence adduced "before your committee of diminished outgoings, con-
 "trasted with the change of prices in the interval,
 "would warrant, at this moment, a different conclusion."
 The average price of wheat in 1821 was 54s. 5d. per quarter; the average price of 1833 was stated at 53s. 1d. per quarter, and, "although some of the "charges connected with general taxation had been "reduced since 1821, the local burthens, such as poor-
 "rate and county-rate had been grievously augmented." The report then expressed a fear that the difficulties of the occupiers alone remained unchanged, but that their savings, arising from high prices previous to 1821, and which were alluded to by the committee of that date, were "either gone or greatly diminished." The report of 1821 had assumed, that the annual growth of corn in the United Kingdom was, upon an average crop, about equal to the annual consumption; but the committee of 1833 were "satisfied, by the "strongest concurrent testimony from different parts of "Great Britain, that the occupiers of inferior soils, "*especially of heavy clay-land, have of late expended "less labour and capital in their cultivation.* This "neglect," observes the report, "*arising from low "profit and prices inadequate to the cost of production,*

“combined with a series of wet seasons, peculiarly disadvantageous to land of this description, has caused a diminution in the gross amount of produce, and the discontinuance of the use of artificial manures, together with a system of over-cropping, has impaired the productive power of these inferior soils; and in some cases, where the poor-rate is heavy, their cultivation has been entirely abandoned. Moreover, it is not unworthy of observation, that these clay-lands are, in many instances, proved to be ancient corn land, on which wheat has been grown from time immemorial.”

It was stated that there had been great diminution of the stock of grain on hand, as compared with 1816, when, according to the evidence of Mr. Jacob, there was, previously to the harvest of that year of scarcity, six months' supply of wheat in the hands of the farmers and dealers; and the accuracy of that gentleman's general view was stated to have been confirmed by the local experience of occupying farmers throughout England. Mr. Jacob's evidence on this point is very striking. He says, “I did suppose, at one time, when we had a harvest in 1816, which was so very deficient, we had then six months' consumption in the country. I do not think there has been a month's consumption in the country at the time of harvest since 1829.”

“Q. 64.—Can you form any opinion of what was the cause of the reduced stock in the hands of the farmers?—A. I suppose, in some measure, the reduction of capital; *they have been paying a good deal of rent out of their capital.*”

“Q. 51.—You say that in 1816, preceding the bad harvest of that year, you think there were six months' consumption in store, and recently not more than one month; supposing the harvest of 1816 were to come over again, from whence do you contemplate the

supply?—A. It could not be supplied from all the world. My opinion is, that if we were to diminish the growth of English wheat by one-tenth of that now produced, we should not be in a safe state in case of a deficient harvest; for all the world could not make up the deficiency. We are now about four weeks in the year deficient in our growth on an average; last year the harvest was one month earlier than the year previous, so that we were enabled to get to the end of the year. The harvest of 1832 ought to supply thirteen months, and I dare say it will do so; but if we have a deficient harvest, and the next harvest gives us but eleven months' supply, and owing to bad weather it be deficient one-tenth more, there would be such a deficiency as all the world could not easily supply at any price; *for wheat is not the food of man in any other country to the same extent as in England.* In France even, where wheat is much more used than in the north and east of Europe, Chaptal states that there are only about 17,000,000 of quarters grown, of which near 3,000,000 is wanted for seed, and that for a population of 30,000,000 persons, whilst we require nearly as much for half that number of persons; yet the French are supposed to be a nation of bread-eaters."

This, and similar evidence, established to the satisfaction of the committee, that the capital of the farmers had diminished, and inferentially proved (as they thought) the hazard of depending to any large extent upon a foreign supply of grain.

The report then went on to say, that the committee had formed a decided opinion that the stocks of home grown wheat in the hands of the farmer and dealer had gradually diminished; *that the produce of Great Britain was on an average of years unequal to the consumption*; that the increased supply from Ireland did not cover the deficiency; and, that in the (then) present state of agriculture, the United Kingdom was, in years of ordinary production, partially dependent on the supply of wheat from foreign countries. The increase of the poor rate, county and highway rates, *as a burthen upon the farmer*, were specially referred

to by the report ; but the committee, in reference to rent, said, “ those outgoings, however, which the “ law does not impose, are placed beyond the control “ of the legislature, are private bargains open from “ time to time and regulated by competition. Who “ are to judge what profit, rent, and wages ought to “ be ? Certainly no legislative authority ; for these are “ matters of convention, dictated by the reciprocal “ convenience of the parties, and silently indeed, but “ surely, adjusted to their reciprocal necessities.”

The improved condition of the labourer was distinctly recognised. On this subject the report says, “ Amidst “ the numerous difficulties to which the agriculture in “ this country is exposed, and amidst the distress which “ unhappily exists, it is a consolation to your com- “ mittee to find that the general condition of the agri- “ cultural labourer, in full employment, is better now “ than at any former period, his money wages giving “ him a greater command over the necessaries and “ conveniences of life.” And a contrast is exhibited between the condition of a Somersetshire labourer, as described before the committee of 1821, and that of the same peasant in 1833. The instance taken from a particular county was declared to be no unfair sample of the improved condition of the labourer in full employment throughout the country *.

* It must not be supposed, because I have only incidentally alluded to this part of the subject, that, from the sources whence I have derived the facts and reasonings of my text, I could not have adduced most abundant evidence of the immense advantages low prices of food bring to the agricultural labourer ; but my main object being to show, that the owners and occupiers of land, and

The committee stated, that the Scotch farmer had suffered less from the fall of prices than the English; having been protected by the corn rents, then lately come into general use in Scotland, from the effects of a falling market. In Ireland, as far as the then growing demand of the English market extended, agriculture was improving, and the growth of wheat and other produce rapidly increasing.

The report emphatically adverts to the importance of steadiness of price, and the injury inflicted upon every branch of rural economy by fluctuations in prices. The uncertainty of seasons must frequently cause grievous vicissitudes to all engaged in the cultivation of land; but “artificial fluctuations, whether they arise
“from alternations in the value of money, or from
“changes in the corn laws, only aggravate the evil;
“they *render the income of the landlord precarious,*
“*the fixed rent of the farmer a hazardous speculation,*
“and the wages of the labourer an uncertain remuneration. *Steadiness of price, which is conducive to*
“*settled habits and forms the basis of all fixed engagements, is the primary object never to be again*
“*overlooked.*” The conclusion the committee drew from these premises was, that the then existing corn law, that of 1828, had produced steadiness of price, and that any change in that law was to be deprecated. The report adds, that rents were then rapidly approximating to the level of existing prices, and that

especially the latter, have been injured and not benefited by the corn laws—that too being the only ground upon which the protectionists now make any serious stand.—I have thought it better not to encumber the principal argument with any collateral topics, however important in themselves.

“ the hopes of melioration in the condition of the
 “ landed interest rest rather on the cautious forbear-
 “ ance, than on the active interposition of Parliament.”

When the objects for which the appointment of this committee was promoted, and the spirit in which its examinations were conducted—clearly evincing extreme views of the necessity of protection—the report becomes important evidence that restriction had *not* secured to the agricultural interest that kind of prosperity its advocates so vainly sought for. Though some of the members of the committee might have dreamed of altering the law of 1828, by the adoption of a more stringent monopoly, all that was passing around them so clearly demonstrated the impossibility of effecting such a change, and a public opinion of the impolicy of corn laws had been so constantly growing, that the efforts of the friends of “ protection to agriculture” were directed rather to preserve the then corn law from alteration, than to increase its restrictive provisions. In obtaining a defensive report, the success of the advocates of the corn law was complete; but the assertion that farming capital was diminishing (with the exception of a few limited districts), is directly contradicted by nearly all cotemporary evidence. The witnesses who were examined generally came with a strong, lingering feeling for the high prices of the war, and their instances of retrograde cultivation were invariably confined to clay soils, a description of land which had been particularly obnoxious to injury from preceding four or five years of redundant moisture. Many intelligent agriculturists had, in 1833, arrived at the conclusion that a somewhat different system of cultivation would become necessary,

if the prices of grain continued at a permanently low range; but so completely had the existing generation of farmers been educated to look for profit chiefly from their grain crop, and to base their calculations upon high prices, that it required the experience of another series of variations to make them understand how fallacious such expectations must prove.

That the corn laws, which successively promised a *minimum* price of 80s. and 70s., mainly contributed to prevent the agriculturists from appreciating their actual condition there is no doubt; and it is equally certain that the only object the framers of those laws had was to keep up money rents. Under certain circumstances, it was apparently the common interest of both farmers and landlords to maintain high prices, and for a long time both classes were satisfied to co-operate with each other, for the procurement of that desideratum, so far as legislative enactment could secure it. But there was also a conflict of interests between landlords and tenants, which, though overlooked while the struggle to visit the consumer with artificial scarcity appeared temporarily successful, became fully apparent when an abundant harvest had cheapened corn below the average level of the European market, by mere competition amongst the home growers. Then tenants began to see, that though they could "pay in produce," that is, though they could deliver to their landlords so much grain, at the prices of corn when they made their bargains as would make up their rents, they could not, when prices had fallen perhaps a third or a fourth, make up their money rents without selling for that purpose such a proportion of their whole produce as was absolutely ruinous. This truth was more apprehended

in Scotland than in England, and led in the former country, about 1822, to a very general conversion of the money rents, stipulated for in 1814, into corn rents; and nothing but the fluctuations in price caused by the corn law, prevented its perception throughout the kingdom. Farmers began to perceive, that the existing competition for farms would enable landlords to obtain the largest share of the produce, calculated at prices artificially enhanced by the corn laws, which farmers, when obtaining such prices, could possibly offer, while, if in fact these prices were not constantly sustained, the contract for a farm became merely a catching bargain, which placed the farmer at his landlord's mercy.

Very many sacrifices of capital were undoubtedly made by tenants in the interval between 1821 and 1833, and they fell most heavily upon the occupiers of clay lands from two causes; first, the extreme wetness of the years 1827, 1828, and 1829 had been peculiarly injurious to such soils; and secondly, the farmers on "heavy clay land" had always been in the habit of looking exclusively to wheat, in a greater degree than any other farmers. From the wet seasons, too, the heavy land farmers in many of the most fertile English counties, had been severe losers from the rot amongst their flocks, which prevailed so extensively during these years as to become an important national calamity. The observation of the committee, that the deterioration, which they had reported as having occurred on "heavy clay land," had happened on land "in many instances proved to be ancient corn land, on which wheat had been grown from time immemorial," shows that they were imperfectly acquainted with, or

were unwilling to admit, the changes which had taken place in wheat cultivation. Nearly all specific instances of loss, proved before the committee of 1833, went to show, either that the landlord had insisted too rigidly upon the letter of engagements made under a mistaken estimate of the prices of produce; or the tenant had expended his capital on land peculiarly fitted for wheat, and with too exclusive a reference to the production of that grain; or some grievous loss, as from the rot, had been suffered from the wetness of the few previous years. It was proved in evidence, that surveyors, in making their valuations, take only the actual prices of the day; and it is plain, that so long as the farmer's rent is fixed on a calculation of prices having a continual tendency to fall, he must inevitably be a loser, if his landlord insists upon the full amount of rent.

I shall not dwell long upon the evidence of 1833, inasmuch as the witnesses examined before the committee of 1836 spoke to the same period of time, with the advantage of an experience derived from three additional years of most exuberant abundance. Some part of the testimony of Professor Low, is however so much in point, in reference to what I have said upon the subject of heavy land, that it ought not to be passed over. Professor Low, who had through life been a surveyor extensively employed in Scotland, to the question, "If you were to be asked as to the value of a farm this year, to enter at Martinmas next for nineteen years, and you were directed to be cautious not to mislead the employer in asking too large a rent, but to put such a value on the land as, presuming the corn law to remain the law, the tenant could afford to pay;

“ from your experience of that law, what price would
 “ you put upon the quarter of wheat as between land-
 “ lord and tenant?” replied, “ I should have great
 “ difficulty in determining that point. *Valuers of land*
 “ *have generally only occasion to consider the letting rate*
 “ *of land at the time.* I have occasion to know that the
 “ farmers themselves have been recently calculating
 “ pretty much upon the following prices; wheat from
 “ 56s. to 60s. per quarter, average 58s.; barley, 32s.;
 “ oats, 24s.; and at those rates I conceive, with ave-
 “ rage crops and a good price, a fair price for butchers’
 “ meat, the rents now in the course of being stipulated
 “ for could be paid.”

Again he says, “ In one highly cultivated district in
 “ East Lothian, where the farmers have trusted to
 “ tillage rather than live stock, there has been very
 “ great distress, and a greater fall of rents than in any
 “ other part of Scotland. Here the system has been
 “ to have their lands under a course of constant crops;
 “ the tenants have expended capital largely upon it, and
 “ trusted to larger returns of produce perhaps than in
 “ any other part of Scotland. The district has suffered
 “ from deficiency of its staple produce, wheat, during
 “ three successive years, 1826, 1827, and 1828. In
 “ this district 25 per cent. reduction on the rent has
 “ not been sufficient to save the tenant’s capital.”

The whole of Scotland had diminished its growth of
 wheat upon the aggregate, but, with the exception of
 the district in the Lothians (strong clay land), before-
 mentioned *not acreably*.

So the evidence of Mr. William Ruddell Brown, of
 Broad Hinton, near Marlborough in Wiltshire, not
 only offers a fair specimen of the evidence on which

the report was founded ; but, as I am well acquainted with the district in which his farm is situated, and, I believe, with the farm itself, I will endeavour to illustrate the testimony by particulars which do not appear in the appendix to the report.

Mr. Brown stated, that he occupied a farm of 1,800 acres, which he entered in 1812, taking to the latter end of a lease which expired in 1817 ; that on his new taking (for ten years) the rent was reduced " about 10 per cent.," and he continued to hold his farm at the same rent until 1833, when he was about to give it up, " because he found farming unprofitable." The total amount of rent was not mentioned, but the farm was stated not to have been highly rented, in comparison with other land in the neighbourhood. The quality of the soil was very various, some part chalk, and other parts strong clay ; the one description of land being so intermixed with the other, that both were frequently found in different parts of the same field. Subsequently, Mr. Brown said, the best of his land was rented at about 30*s.* the acre, with a tithe composition of 7*s.* ; and this land produced, on an average, 24 bushels of wheat an acre : the rent of his inferior land was about 20*s.*, and tithe 5*s.* 1*d.* an acre, and its produce per acre of wheat was, on an average, 18 bushels. A large flock of sheep, amounting to 1,400, was kept, and a small dairy. From 1812 to 1830 the sheep answered best, yet they appeared to have been subject to some considerable casualties. In 1821 his flock was infected with the rot from the wetness of the season, and in 1830 no less than 500 sheep died from that disease in four months, and 400 more were sold at 3*s.* 8*d.* a piece. Mr. Brown estimated

his loss, in that year, at 4,000*l*. He also stated, that his losses in 1822, when he sold great quantities of damaged wheat at 3*s*. a bushel, had been very serious. The amount of capital originally invested on the farm in 1812 was 8,000*l*., and Mr. Brown expected to realise only 6,000*l*., though he had not sold his last crop, which was then growing; and he believed, that the result of his 20 years' occupation would be the loss of 2,000*l*. the difference in the money value of his stock on entering, and its (presumed) produce on going off. Mr. Brown's account of the prospects of agriculturists was somewhat desponding, and he is one of those who seemed to think cultivation on the clay soils had been deteriorating. He said, that about 15 per cent. had been the average abatement from the war rents in North Wiltshire, but that 30 per cent. must be abated if the then prices of corn continued. Mr. Brown stated, that he employed more labourers than he actually wanted, to keep them off the parish rates; and expressly noticed, that the labourers had never been so well off as at that time. Indeed, the report of the committee as to the improved condition of agricultural labourers sets at rest for ever any question — if such question could ever have been fairly raised — as to the benefits conferred upon farming labourers by low prices of farm produce. The poor rate on this farm amounted to 4*s*. in the pound upon the rack rental. Thus the rent, tithe, and poor rate upon the best land, producing 24 bushels of wheat, would amount together to 4*l*. per acre; and on the inferior, producing 18 bushels, to 29*s*. 6*d*. per acre.

Now it is impossible to read this evidence without being struck with the fact, that no question on the sub-

ject of draining was asked by the committee, nor was any allusion thereto made by Mr. Brown, yet he had suffered severely from the rot in his flock in 1821; and, though this loss was so obviously caused by the wetness of the land, yet nothing in the shape of a remedy appeared to have been thought of for nine years, when, from the same cause, a second loss of 4,000*l.*, amounting to one-half of the total value of the capital engaged on the farm, was sustained. My own impression is, that no draining was done in that particular district in which Mr. Brown's farm is situated during that interval; and I believe few weeks passed at that time in which I did not ride by or over some part of it. The farm lies upon the shoulder of land between the abrupt termination of the north-western extremity of the Wiltshire chalk hills, and consists principally of strong, deep, and heavy, but not infertile clay, on the chalk marle formation: the southern extremity of the farm must be on the chalk hills, while the north stretches down into the pasture district of North Wilts*. Broad Hinton lies open to the north, and had the reputation of backward land, but I was much surprised to read the small *acreable* produce of wheat stated by Mr. Brown to have been his average crop. The whole of this district is capable of being easily drained, having a gentle inclination throughout its breadth towards the great

* Mr. Ellman, of Glynde, Sussex, whose farm appears to occupy, geologically, a site precisely analagous to that of Mr. Brown's farm in Wiltshire, *viz.* partly on the chalk hills and partly on the deep clay of the chalk marle below the chalk, particularly stated, in reference to the rotting of sheep, that the springy land at the foot of the chalk, *if not most carefully drained*, was very apt to produce the rot amongst sheep.

vale which lies beneath it; and the immediate vicinity of the chalk would render the extensive use of lime of ready attainment, though I believe draining alone to be necessary to render this soil, which is a clay-marle, extremely productive. I am convinced that a too exclusive cultivation of wheat and beans was the great cause of the complaints of such farmers as Mr. Brown in North Wilts.

But taking his own account of his farming, does it bear such a decisive character of loss as to induce an intelligent farmer to withdraw from the pursuit? I think not. Mr. Brown admitted he had made money by his farm, when his losses in 1821, and 1830 by sheep, and in 1822 by a bad wheat harvest, cut down his profit; but even then his loss was confined to the estimated difference of his stock sold off at a period of agricultural depression, having been bought in at the very zenith of the high prices.

No change of system had been made in consequence of the alteration of times, nor had any of those enterprising outlays, in the shape of drainage and liming, by which the Scotch agriculturists met the low price of grain; and concurrently with several bad seasons for the crops on strong land, there was the tremendous loss, by rot, on sheep. This case can scarcely be cited as evidence that the cultivation of strong land was in a "state of progressive deterioration." Mr. Brown was a man of ample means, and I have no doubt he withdrew from farming under feelings of disgust at the loss he had sustained in 1830; besides, he about that time obtained a lucrative land-agency, which rendered a residence in another part of the country more convenient.

Mr. Robert Hughes, another witness examined in 1833, and who had long been much employed as a surveyor and land-agent in Wiltshire, expressly stated, that no land had gone out of cultivation in that county, and that neither the capital employed, the produce of wheat, or the stocks of old corn, had diminished. Yet he was several times led into a *general statement*, that the farmers' capital in Wiltshire had deteriorated, an apparent inconsistency, which a perusal of his evidence shows to have arisen from the fact, that he called the lessened money-value of farming stock a deterioration of capital; a circumstance likely to be strongly impressed upon this gentleman's mind from his having relinquished farming about three years previously, and probably converted his stock into money at prices far below its original cost. Mr. Hughes had held 2,000 acres upon the same stratum of land as Mr. Brown, *viz.* on the chalk marle, and not many miles from Broad Hinton; and probably a comparison of his ingoing during the war, and his outgoing about 1830, presented a difference in figures of considerable magnitude. Such a loss, however, if loss it can be called, is most improperly termed a deterioration of capital; as the stock would have been as effective as ever for carrying on the business of farming. The same thing would happen, on selling off, in almost any business on the stock being realised; and indeed might easily occur, and often has occurred, upon an investment in the funds. Though Mr. Hughes was evidently an ardent protectionist, the whole effect of his evidence is adverse to the views he advocated, and made strongly against the conclusion of the committee, that agriculture was declining. He stated, that within a year or two the rents of as many as 200 farms had been settled by his

valuations, and that upon an average the reduction of rents from those of 1814 scarcely amounted to 10 per cent., that he generally fixed the rent without being made aware of the former rental, and his valuation very often exceeded the old rent. The basis upon which he valued was to calculate wheat at 56s. a quarter, and barley and oats in proportion: in 1814, and for some time afterwards, he had been accustomed to assume that the price of wheat would be 80s. a quarter; and he expressly stated, that the fluctuations of these recent years, together with the uncertainty whether the corn laws could be maintained, rendered it very difficult to make *any* satisfactory calculations. Mr. Hughes, like most of the other witnesses, represented the strong wheat lands as those on which the tenants had suffered most from the low price of wheat, and the three successive wet seasons.

But a period of low prices was then commencing, which no legislative enactments could correct, and which, in three years, taught the agriculturists the absolute futility of protection. The crop of 1832 was an average one; and the summer of 1833 having been dry and warm, the wheat crops, though reported thin on the ground, were found to yield well and to be of good quality. The wheat crop of 1834 was the most productive ever remembered in this country, and, with partial exceptions in limited districts, was secured in good order. This, with the stock on hand, reduced the average price, at the close of the year, to 40s. 6d. a quarter. The produce of 1835 was little less luxuriant than that of 1834, but the bulk of straw being unusually great, some heavy rains in the last few days of June, accompanied by high winds, laid the crops more extensively than was ever known to have

occurred in the same space of time ; the wheat never entirely recovered, and the yield was inferior to that of the preceding year, though the harvest was fine, and the new corn came early to market in good condition. The average price, in December, 1835, was as low as 36*s.* the imperial quarter !! Though nobody attempted to attribute the low prices to any thing but the exuberance of three successive harvests, the usual cry of agricultural distress was so loudly raised, that select committees of both Houses of Parliament were appointed to inquire into the nature and causes of the alleged distress. And although neither committee could agree upon a report, the evidence offered to the Commons' committee (which for extent, variety, and importance exceeded that of any former inquiry) left no doubt upon the minds of all unprejudiced persons that the protection, promised to the agriculturists by the corn laws, was entirely illusory ; and that little or no compensation was obtained, even by the landed interest, for the mischiefs those laws occasioned to the community at large. It is impossible to read that evidence without being convinced that the cheapness of 1834 and 1835 resulted from plentiful harvests and improved cultivation, which had become partially and silently adopted by a large proportion of the most intelligent agriculturists. And now it appeared that the occupiers of the clay lands had obtained the largest share of nature's bounty, the dry warm summers having been peculiarly favourable to the heavy soils.

Mr. John Ellman, of Glynde, Sussex, said, that " upon clay lands the produce of wheat in the last " three years had been most extraordinary ;" and that the increase in quantity upon such soils was quite sufficient

to account for the low prices. So favourable were the dry summers to the growth of wheat upon strong land, that Mr. Ellman said the clay soils which usually produced about twenty bushels to the acre, in the two last years had averaged in Sussex thirty bushels, being an increase of one-third. Besides, the fine seed time of those years had occasioned a great additional breadth to be sown. This was spoken to by many of the witnesses.

Mr. Robert Hope, of Haddington, gave a more precise measure of the increase per acre of the wheat crop on his farm in 1832, 1833, 1834, and 1835, as compared with that of 1828, 1829, 1830, and 1831; in the first named years the average yearly produce was 657 quarters of wheat on 175 acres; while, in the four preceding years, the yearly average upon the same quantity of land was only 385 quarters, being an excess of 272 quarters a year upon 175 acres, in each of the good years; and this, though in a small degree the effect of improvement of his farm, arose chiefly from the favourable season. Wheat had not been so low in this country since 1780, which sufficiently proved, that, notwithstanding the vastly increased consumption of modern times, such had been the advances made in the art of husbandry that the produce of the United Kingdom, *in favourable seasons*, was fully sufficient for the increased population.

Some variations of opinion have prevailed at different times as to the sufficiency of the home-growth of corn for the supply of the community. The committee of 1821 said, "our growth is probably equal on an average to our consumption," while that of 1833 thought that the produce of Great Britain was, on an average of

years, unequal to the consumption, and that in years of ordinary production the United Kingdom was partially dependent on a supply of wheat from foreign countries. Mr. Jacob was then also of opinion, that, upon an average, 1,500,000 quarters of foreign wheat, or, at his estimate about a month's consumption, was yearly required in aid of our native produce. In 1836 again, the general inclination of the opinions given was, that in ordinary years our production was sufficient for our consumption; and it was shown beyond all question, that in years of such abundant produce as 1833, 1834, and 1835, our growth of wheat was fully equal to the consumption of the United Kingdom, then at its very highest point from the activity existing in all branches of commerce and manufactures. Since 1836, there has been a large yearly importation of corn, and prices, up to the harvest of last year, indicated a considerable degree of scarcity. The question, however, seems not to be very material; because it is clear that in seasons of deficiency, which for the last fifty years have recurred every three or four years, and commonly in periods of several years in succession, notwithstanding the stimulus to grain growing apparently given by the corn laws, some considerable supply of corn must be derived from foreign countries. Every obstacle to importation, therefore, which is interposed, whether by the actual amount of duties levied, or through the jugglery of a sliding scale, must greatly aggravate the sufferings of the community under a bad season. No practicable scheme can secure to the British agriculturist the absolute monopoly of the British market, and all the attempts to secure a partial monopoly have resulted in alternate distress to the consuming public

and the agricultural interest; a state from which there will be no relief until the natural laws of supply and demand are left to their unimpeded course.

Few persons, not practically acquainted with agriculture, are aware of the great variations which occur in the productiveness of different years. I have before alluded to the great acreable increase of wheat grown by Mr. Hope in Haddingtonshire, in the four abundant years preceding 1836, over the antecedent four years of comparative deficiency, and Mr. A. Howden adduces similar facts. His wheat crop on one hundred acres of land was—

In 1829	...	...	...	...	664 sacks.
1830	...	...	...	...	476 do.
1831	...	...	...	...	520 do.

Total of three deficient years 1660 sacks.

In 1832	...	...	...	...	845 sacks.
1833	...	...	...	...	1078 do.
1834	...	...	...	...	800 do.

Total of three productive years 2723 sacks.

Difference in favour of the productive years 1,063 sacks, or an average annual excess of 177 quarters of wheat upon one hundred acres of land. Again, Mr. Arnall, the inspector of corn returns at Boston, Lincolnshire, which is the market for the grain of a wide district, says, that in 1829, 72,964 quarters of wheat were sold in Boston, and in 1834, 131,370 quarters, showing a difference in the produce of that one district of no less than 58,406 quarters of wheat. The variations in price, between the seasons of dearth and those of abundance, may be put in juxta-position with these differences of quantity: the average of wheat for 1829

was 66*s.* 3*d.* a quarter, and for 1836, after three years of abundance, it was 48*s.* 6*d.* ; the average of the three preceding years having been only 46*s.* a quarter. Such differences in the quantities of home grown wheat are wholly caused by the effect of the seasons, while the breadth of wheat sown always varies with the seasons, increasing after a year or two of deficiency and high price, and diminishing again after years of cheapness and abundance.

Some of the witnesses in 1836 estimated the difference of the breadth of wheat in different years as high as one-fourth or one-fifth ; but a much smaller variation in wheat culture would account for an immense oscillation in price. Nearly all the fluctuations of price, derived from the latter cause, are to be attributed to the corn laws, which have introduced speculation on the price of wheat so largely into the business of the British farmer, who has been too apt to vary his breadth of wheat with the variations of the sliding scale rather than according to deliberately pre-arranged rotations.

Though it is certain that some part of our supply of corn must, occasionally at all events, be obtained from abroad, still the amount required is so small, when compared with our total consumption, and the advantages of the British grower, in his nearness to the market and the goodness of his roads, in his command of capital, and the superiority, upon the whole, of his climate and soil, in his improved and improving knowledge and means of culture over his continental competitor, are so numerous and decided, that it is wonderful the landed interest think their occasional and temporary monopoly—stripped, as the subject has been of

many of its exaggerations—worth the struggle and the losses, the heartburnings and distresses, the maintenance of the corn laws has caused, and possibly may for some little time continue to cause, to the British nation. No corn laws could protect the landed interest against low prices caused by the abundance of home grown grain, and from the period of 1836, when that was generally understood, the abandonment of the corn laws became merely a question of time with the more intelligent agriculturists.

The following review of the agriculture of Scotland since 1814, which I have extracted from the prize essay before referred to, and which was written in 1837, bespoke the more healthy tone of self-reliance which had been growing amongst the agriculturists, especially those of North Britain, for some years:—

“ But while the progress of improvement in agriculture has gone pretty steadily on to this result, its success has not been, as during the former period, so uniformly great; and its history in this respect displays a more chequered aspect. The great fall of prices, which took place about the close of the war, created a reaction, which soon told with severity upon a numerous class of agriculturists. Rents, which had attained an unnatural elevation, from the confidence inspired by so long a continuance of high prices, occasioned a great embarrassment to the majority of tenants. Hence a period of severe agricultural distress early began to manifest itself. The price of wheat, which for the previous five years had averaged upwards of 108s. per quarter, fell in 1815 to 53s. 7d., and in the January of the following year to 52s. 6d.; and although there was a revival of prices to a considerable extent, owing to the deficient harvests of 1816 and 1817, Scotland did not participate much in this improvement, as that deficiency arose from a cause—the lateness of the seasons—which materially influenced the productiveness of the crops in this part of the kingdom. The crop of the following year proved, indeed, productive, but a different result being early anticipated, and alarm being easily excited, from the previous short supplies, an unprecedentedly large importation, amounting to upwards of 1,500,000 quarters in this year, depressed prices again beyond the fair ratio,

and occasioned such an accumulation as operated to keep grain under a remunerating price for many years. A severe check was thus given to agricultural energy in many places, generally felt in those districts where operations had been carried on to such perfection as to induce a freer recourse to corn crops than was consistent with the ultimate preservation of the soil in good heart. In East Lothian, for example, at this time, much distress prevailed, until the high rents prevalent there were adjusted according to a principle having reference to the comparative value of grain at this time with that which existed at the entry to the farms. In other cases, leases entered upon during the prevalence of high rents were fast lapsing; and under a more equitable adjustment of rents, a fresh spirit of enterprise ensued, which, favoured by the very difficulties which now presented themselves, excited to new exertions, and gave rise to new modes of management, which proved successful, to mitigate the threatened distress, and ultimately tended to the advantage of both the occupier and the land. We allude to a more extensive system of grazing, which now became prevalent in some of those districts hitherto entirely, and perhaps under any circumstances too exclusively, devoted to the production of corn crops. The agriculturists of Scotland partook also of the depression which characterised the state of the other industrial classes of the kingdom in 1824-5; but since that period, though certainly not at all times in a flourishing condition as respects their finances, they have gone on in a steady progressive state of improvement, and have added, by their economy, ingenuity, and intelligence, greatly to the increased resources of the country. It is by this greater productiveness that they have been enabled so well, in spite of a much lower range of price, compared with rents, to bear up against a course of circumstances which otherwise must have overwhelmed them; and we need no other proof of the further improvement in Scotch agriculture, since the period of the war, than a comparison of the rents during the war and subsequently, with the now decreased value of agricultural produce. It is to be regretted that we have no means, with perfect precision, accurately to know the comparative amount of these rents, but it seems very generally to be allowed that the decline which took place in the first ten years of this period, has been very materially made up by the rise which has since occurred; so that the rental of Scotland, it is confidently assumed, may now be held equal to what it was in 1810*. The rents being then the

* M'Culloch's Statistical Account, vol. i, p. 539.

same in 1810 and 1837, we find the average price of wheat and barley for ten years previous to these years respectively to stand thus :—

	Wheat.	Barley.
From 1800 to 1810 ...	81s. 2d. per qr.	41s. 5d. per qr.
“ 1826 to 1837 ...	55s. 8d.	31s. 4d.

Butchers' meat and wool, we have reason to believe, were also considerably higher during the former period ; so that, assuming agricultural capital to have yielded an equal return at the two periods, we are compelled to the conclusion, that in productiveness our fields have nearly doubled since the beginning of the century. Now we know, that though this preliminary assumption is far from the truth, it would be much more incorrect to suppose that the whole apparent difference which this article of price exhibits found its way into the pocket of the farmer of the former period : on the contrary, we believe that the great proportion of this difference of price is made up to the farmer of the present day by increased productiveness, perhaps to the amount at least of 70 per cent. This result, it is confidently presumed, has been chiefly brought about during the period under consideration, and has been mainly effected by the judicious intermixture of the feeding and grazing of live stock with arable culture ; by which, not only has the soil been brought to a greater fertility when under culmiferous crops, but to produce all the additional live stock now kept as clear disposable gain. To increase the amount of this live stock has been the chief care of the successful farmer, and has led to many of the greatest improvements in the husbandry of modern days. The great extent to which draining, for instance, has been carried, in a great measure is owing to the desire to produce an additional breadth of turnips, that more live stock may be maintained. Foreign manures have also been introduced, and liberally employed with a like end ; and even the climate has acquired great amelioration from the extensive plantations, which have been executed chiefly with a view to afford shelter for sheep.”

Both in 1834 and 1835, the hot weather, which was so advantageous to the wheat crops, occasioned some deficiency of barley and oats, and beans and peas ; and wheat of the lower kinds was largely substituted for other corn in feeding cattle and swine, and in the distilleries. The immediate effect of the low price of

wheat was to diminish the quantity sown in the autumn of 1835, as stated by some of the witnesses before the Commons' committee, to the extent of from one-fifth to one-fourth; and in the spring of 1836 the appearance of the crop was unfavourable. The harvest in the south of Britain, however, was good; but in Scotland and the north of England the crops were so backward, and the weather so cold and wet, that much of the grain never ripened at all, and considerable quantities of wheat were shipped from London and the eastern counties to the north. The crops had also failed in America, and supplies were sent to that country from Europe; and these circumstances co-operating with the diminished breadth of wheat, raised the average, in the autumn of 1836, to 61*s.* 9*d.* The autumn was remarkably wet; much land intended for wheat was left unsown in the northern districts, and the winter set in early with every appearance of rigour. The winter proved cold, the spring of 1837 ungenial, and the crops backward, under which influences wheat, which had again fallen to 53*s.* at the close of 1836, rose in June, 1837, to 56*s.* 2*d.* The weather during harvest having been somewhat unsettled, the average rose in August to 60*s.* 1*d.*; but eventually the crops were secured in tolerable condition throughout the island, and the markets gave way. Some speculators in foreign corn, who had anticipated a low duty, now entered for consumption about 150,000 quarters of wheat at a high rate of duty. This had been the only importation worth naming since 1831; in 1835 and 1836 there was a small balance of exports. The quality of much of the wheat of 1837 was inferior, and

the spring of 1838 being cold, the summer stormy and dripping, the average of England rose in August to 72*s.* 11*d.* a quarter. The weather on the Continent was not more favourable than in this country, and though 1,715,771 quarters of foreign wheat were admitted into consumption in that year, at the average duty of 1*s.* 7*d.* per quarter, and 311,914 cwt. of foreign flour at 6*d.* per cwt., the price of grain continued to rise, so that at the close of the year the average price of wheat was 76*s.* 1*d.*

The year 1839 was unusually wet, and the average in January and February advanced as high as 79*s.* 8*d.*, and from thence gradually declined, with occasional fluctuations, to 65*s.* 10*d.* by the end of December. No less than 2,500,045 quarters of foreign wheat at a duty of 1*s.* 11*d.*, and 590,117 of wheaten flour at 1*s.* 9*d.* duty, were entered for home consumption in 1839.

The average price, throughout the winter and spring of 1840 ranged between 60*s.* and 70*s.*, being in March, 1840, 67*s.* 7*d.*, and continued at about that sum up to the beginning of July. Now, up to the summer of 1840, the averages were greatly depressed by the badness of the corn, so that these average prices gave no idea of the extent of the deficiency in the crops. In a letter, addressed by Lord Fitzwilliam to the clergy of England, upon the subject of the corn laws, which is dated 29th of March, 1840, his Lordship observes (after stating that the legal averages do not always afford the true criterion of the price of human subsistence), “ that the last harvest “ was, in most parts of England, and the whole of “ Scotland and Ireland, so unfavourable to the preservation of the crop, that a large portion of the corn

“ hitherto brought to market has been totally unfit for
 “ use. The averages therefore have been moderate,
 “ not because it is *plentiful* but because it is *bad*.”

Although the spring of 1840 was cold and harsh, it was dry, as was the great part of the summer. As the harvest approached unfavourable opinions of the crops began to prevail, and a speculative rise in prices occurred, which drove the average for wheat, on the 3d of September, up to 72*s.* 8*d.*, and the large quantity of 1,217,860 quarters of foreign wheat was entered for home consumption in one week, at the duty of 2*s.* 8*d.* : from that time to the end of the year the average quickly declined to 59*s.* 10*d.*, which was the price in the last week of December. In 1840 the total amount of foreign wheat retained for home consumption was 2,011,774 quarters, and the average duty paid was 7*s.* 2*d.*, while no less than 925,722 cwt. of flour at a duty of 3*s.* 7*d.* per cwt. were supplied from abroad. Wetness was again the predominant character of the autumn of 1840, and of the whole year of 1841 ; and the averages began to rise from the commencement of the latter year until the 10th of September, when the average being 73*s.* 2*d.*, 1,852,619 quarters of wheat were admitted at the lowest duty of 1*s.* From that point the average declined to 63*s.* 9*d.* at the end of the year. In this year 2,236,152 quarters of foreign wheat were imported for home consumption at the average duty of 3*s.* 5*d.*, as well as 531,752 cwt. of foreign flour at the duty of 9*d.* per cwt. Thus, in the four years from 1838 to 1841, no less than 8,463,733 quarters of foreign wheat, and 2,359,805 cwt. of foreign flour had been imported, the chief part at duties so low that the protection thereby afforded to the home grower can

only be called nominal. During these four years the manufacturing and commercial classes of the kingdom have been suffering from distress, want of employment, and privation, which for extent, duration, and intensity, have had no parallel in our history; and it is probable that the diminution in the consumption of provisions has, during those years, been greater than even in the high prices of 1812 and 1816: so severe and increasing has been the destitution of the artizan population. This unexampled distress, which has been distinctly traced to the falling off, if not permanent decay, of our foreign trade, has naturally excited a deep and wide-spread feeling of indignation against the corn laws; as those laws have done more, from time to time, to divert and destroy our foreign trade, and to encourage the establishment of rival manufactures in other countries, than all the rest of our restrictive laws put together; yet they are neither few nor innocuous.

But the landed interests have not shown the slightest sign of abating one jot of their cherished protection, and a proposal by the late administration to substitute fixed duties on grain for the sliding scale, led to a dissolution of Parliament, in August, 1841, when free trade, or the maintenance of the existing corn laws became the grand point upon which the general election turned. The result was decisively favourable to the great party now in power, who, led by Sir Robert Peel, received, as the declared champions of the then corn law, the ardent support, not merely of the landed gentry, but of the farming tenantry almost to a man. Yet in spite of the apparent completeness of the victory gained by the protectionists, such was the impression made upon the public

mind by a deplorable harvest—the fourth of decided deficiency in succession — and the unabated depression of commerce and manufactures, and so general had become the opinion that the actual system of restrictive law had failed, that the great pro-corn law leader, Sir Robert Peel, was himself compelled to propose an extensive change in the tariff, and to make some further relaxation in the corn laws. To enable him to prepare for these changes, which were obviously a surprise upon his own party, Parliament was adjourned from September, when it had met after the general election, to February, 1842, and the result was—as regards agriculture—the admission of foreign meat and cattle at moderate duties, and the modification of the sliding scale of duties on grain. In the mean time the autumn of 1841 had been as wet as the summer, so that an extraordinarily large proportion of the land upon heavy soils intended for wheat could not be sown, especially as the first months of 1842 continued equally wet. Yet from its previous high price the breadth of land meant for wheat was very large, and much of it was got in, though badly, in defiance of weather. The crops in the spring looked unpromising, and a fifth bad harvest being confidently predicted, speculation in foreign corn became rife, and the more so, as all the great speculators in that article during the previous four years had made large profits. “Extensive orders,” I quote from the *Mark Lane Express*, of the 2nd of January, 1843, “were transmitted to all the continental “ports to purchase wheat at almost unlimited prices, “and quotations were speedily driven up in all parts “of Europe.” The summer, however, proved remarkably fine, and something like a panic arose amongst

the farmers, under apprehensions caused by Sir Robert Peel's measures, and the indications those measures afforded that the days of protection to agriculture were numbered.

"The finest weather possible," I quote from the same authority, "during the whole of the summer and autumn, produced a wonderful improvement in the growing wheat, and instead of a decidedly deficient crop, which had been all along calculated on, a fair acreable produce, of a quality perhaps never exceeded, was secured. This, with Sir Robert Peel's new corn law, occasioned so rapid a fall in prices, that it soon became manifest the duty would not fall to the minimum point; and, with a great depreciation in the value of the article, importers had to pay an 8s. duty. Then the panic [in the corn trade] begun, failure succeeded failure, all confidence was destroyed: speculators went first, then the factors who had advanced heavily were involved, and such an alarm was created, that corn paper*, however respectable, was, for a period, almost unnegotiable in the money market." Under such circumstances, a large quantity of foreign corn entered into the home market, competing unnaturally with British new wheat; prices rapidly fell at the end of December last to the average of 47s. 2d., a fall of 16s. 7d. on the quarter of wheat since the corresponding month of 1841. In other kinds of grain, the difference of prices was in about the same proportion.

* A banking firm at Wakefield, the great Yorkshire corn market, has recently (February, 1843) issued a circular expressly to notify that they should decline to discount or place to the credit of customers any bill connected with operations in corn.

The total quantity of foreign wheat imported in 1842, under the old law, was 1,326,173; and, according to Messrs. Sturge's circular, 3,039,521 * quarters had been entered for home consumption under the new law, which, with the fine quality of last year's crop, and the remarkably fine seed time just gone by, will, with an ordinary season, probably prevent any great rise of price during the current year. The number of acres sown with wheat this season is greater than for many years past, and hitherto the crops are everywhere looking well.

Having thus brought down the history of the corn trade to the present time, and before entering upon the consideration of the prospects of agriculture under the new laws which regulate the foreign trade in corn and meat, I will just glance at the effect and nature of our demand upon the corn exporting countries of Europe during the last five years. And the necessary information for that purpose is at hand; the government having, in November, 1841, dispatched Mr. Meek to the north of Europe for the purpose of obtaining information concerning the cost and supply of various agricultural produce in that part of the world. Mr. Meek's report coincides closely with those of Mr. Jacob, made upon the same districts in 1826 and 1828; for he states that, with the exception of Prussian Posen, there are no districts from which any great increase of corn is likely to be produced for exportation, except at rates which would "have a powerful tendency to equalise prices" here and on the Continent; and even that increase could

* So stated in the Mark Lane Express, but I suspect some mistake in the figures; the quantity was however very large, and the exact amount does not affect my argument.

only be expected under the influence of a steady demand, and that time and outlay would be necessary to bring it into operation. The districts in Prussian Posen, which Mr. Meek refers to as "unexhausted by tillage," are without good roads, the effect of which, in enhancing the cost of corn on the Continent, is so fully stated by Mr. Jacob*. I have mentioned the large importation into this country, which occurred on the 10th of September, 1841, and, as an illustration of the effect of our occasional demand, Mr. Meek, speaking of Bremen, says, "In September last, at the time the low duty was expected to take place, in the anxiety of the corn merchants to export all that was possible, *wheat was bought from the bakers, in as small quantities as eight and ten quarters from each person; and an easterly wind enabled the vessels by which it was shipped to arrive in time.*" In most of the corn countries, the English demand of the last few years had raised the value and price of land, and the prices of provisions, nearly fifty per cent.; and the result of Mr. Meek's inquiries is, that in ordinary seasons, about the same quantity of grain as has been obtained during the last four years, might be procured from the north of Europe at about 45s. a quarter. This presupposes foreign corn to be constantly admissible in England, and the season on the Continent to be an average one.

* Ante, p. 81.

SECTION IV.

THE CORN LAW AND TARIFF OF 1842. PRESENT CONDITION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF BRITISH AGRICULTURE.

THE corn law of 1842 (5 & 6 Vict. c. 14), retains the principle of shifting duties, which was contained in that of 1828; the details merely being so altered, that the enormous nominal and practically inoperative duties of the former law are got rid of, and when prices range from 64*s.* to 69*s.* a quarter, the duties on wheat are 6*s.*, 7*s.*, and 8*s.* a quarter respectively. An alteration in the manner of taking the average prices has been made of the same kind, and with the same effect, as that introduced in the law of 1828, by adding a considerable number of small market towns to those from whence returns of sales are to be sent. The most moderate calculations estimate, that by this change the averages are lowered 2*s.* a quarter on wheat, while others rate the reduction of the average from this cause at 5*s.* a quarter. Probably the former is nearer the truth; for though the prices in the obscure markets, now included in the returns, will be a good deal lower than those of the larger markets, the quantities sold will be small in the same proportion: but importation by this operation is covertly retarded till prices rise full 2*s.* a quarter beyond the

old averages*. This is the new scale ; the highest duty on wheat is 20s. a quarter, which is to be levied whenever the average price is under 51s. the quarter ; at 52s., the duty is 19s. ; at 53s. and 54s., 18s. ; from thence diminishing one shilling of duty with every shilling of advance in the average price, until such price reaches 66s. a quarter, when the duty, then reduced to 6s. a quarter, remains stationary until the average price rises to 69s. The same diminution of one shilling of duty for every increase of a shilling in the average price then recommences, and goes on until at 73s. the duty is 1s. a quarter, which ceases altogether on the average price attaining 74s.

About the usual proportions between wheat, barley, oats, and other grain are observed ; the highest duty on barley, rye, beans, and peas being 11s., when the average price is 26s. ; and on oats, the highest duty is 8s., levied when the average price is 18s. Similar rests in the scale are established in respect of the duties on other grain as on wheat. Colonial wheat is admitted at 5s. duty, when the price shall be less than 55s. a quarter, decreasing at the rate of 1s. with every rise of a shilling in the average price.

On looking at the weekly average of prices, whenever grain has an upward tendency, it is impossible

* I see that Lord Radnor, with a view of showing what has been the effect of the new mode of taking the averages, has moved in the House of Lords for returns—first, of the averages by which duties are regulated under the new act ; secondly, the weekly averages on which the duties would have been calculated under the law of 1828 ; and, thirdly, the weekly averages from the additional towns only, which under the act of 1842 were directed to make returns. When these returns have been received, the extent to which the late act has lowered the averages will be apparent.

not to be struck with the long periods during which the averages range between 64s. and 69s.; and the rests in the new scale bespeak an opinion in its framer's mind that a duty of from 6s. to 8s. can be levied upon the greatest portion of foreign wheat imported; and, notwithstanding the transactions of the last year seem to countenance such an opinion, there is no difficulty in showing its fallacy. The experience of the last thirty years has shown, that in this country the average price of wheat can never reach 64s., except from an anticipated or actual failure of the wheat crop; and so certainly has the price, after attaining 64s., risen to 70s. and upwards, that the speculators in foreign wheat may in general safely hold on until the lower duties of 3s., 2s., and 1s. only are chargeable. The fact that a large quantity of foreign wheat paid the 8s. duty last year in no way contradicts this conclusion, for the great entries then made were on account of the creditors of broken speculators and failing factors, the result of a complete break-down in the foreign corn trade from speculations undertaken upon erroneous premises, and when there was nobody to hold over the purchased corn. Now, the failure of this speculation was entirely caused by the harvest turning out so much more productive, both as to quantity and quality, than had been expected. The deficiency in the great wheat growing districts of the eastern counties has been satisfactorily proved; but sufficient allowance was not made for the vast growth of wheat in other districts, where the wet autumn of the previous year had been less injurious. This is distinctly pointed out as the origin of the numerous failures in Messrs. Sturge's circular, to which I have before referred, where they say, "The early and favourable

“harvest brought the new grain to market sooner than
 “was calculated upon, and the operation of the new law
 “resulted in 8s. as the lowest point at which the duty
 “became payable ; this added seriously to the previous
 “cost and charges, besides which it absorbed so much
 “capital, that it lessened the power of importers to
 “hold, and, in consequence, a much greater quantity
 “was pressed on the market than either consumers or
 “speculators were disposed to purchase. Under these
 “circumstances, *extensive forced sales were made in*
 “*some of the leading markets, at prices which incurred*
 “*a loss of from 20s. to 30s. a quarter.*”

To assume, therefore, that importations under the new law will take place, except at the very lowest rates of duty, from the exceptional and accidental fact of the 8s. duty having been paid last year, would lead us into important error ; and taking what appeared by the evidence of surveyors, in 1836, to be their calculated price of wheat in the indifferent seasons which preceded 1832, *viz.* 56s. a quarter as the average price, the duty of 16s. a quarter, then payable, would be as strictly prohibitory as the 24s. 8d. of the old scale. The modification of the corn law, then, is apparent, not real, whether the interest of the consumer who wants low, or of the farmer who requires steady prices, is considered. Indeed, it is agreed on all hands, that this law cannot be deemed permanent, and there are indications that before the landed interest will be induced to abandon their protective system, a fixed duty of 5s. or 6s. a quarter will be attempted, for the 8s. duty proposed by the late government is confessedly too high ever again to be seriously discussed. As regards the consumers, a fixed duty of 5s. on

foreign wheat would in its operation be a tax of that amount upon every quarter of wheat sold in this country, whether of foreign or domestic produce; for no foreign wheat would be imported until the price in this country had risen at least 5*s.* a quarter beyond the average of continental prices, and the expenses of transport from the foreign port, with the ordinary merchant's profit. Now every account of the foreign corn markets tends to show that the sudden demands for wheat, which, under the sliding scale, this country makes upon those markets, offer far greater temptations to the foreign merchant than would exist under any system which did not occasionally permit import at nominal duties after a period of virtual prohibition; yet with that stimulus, and the accumulated surplus of the previous abundant years, the average yearly importations since 1838 have been little more than two millions of quarters; and large as such a quantity seems, and restricted as our consumption has been, from the universal depression of trade during all that time, the yearly average prices of the four years have ranged between 64*s.* and 70*s.* 8*d.* Will the country bear a tax of 5*s.* a quarter on its wheat — on every quarter consumed — with the average price ranging above 64*s.*? No one, looking at the temper of the times, the declared opinions of the most influential members of the government, and of the leaders of the Whig party, let alone the growing influence of the Anti-Corn Law League, can soberly believe that such an imposition will be submitted to for the now naked purpose of keeping up rents. It matters not that rents may not in the long run be kept up by a corn law, but so long as consumers on the one hand, and landowners

on the other, believe that rents can be sustained by protective duties, and while an exorbitant rise in price is occasionally caused by those duties, a struggle injurious to both parties will be going on.

That consumers, and more especially our great manufacturing population, are in various ways seriously affected by any corn law, is a position nobody at this time attempts to controvert; the only question now is, how will the agricultural body themselves be affected by a free trade in corn? To a dispassionate examination of that question I would direct the attention of the reader. The new tariff has allowed the importation of live cattle, articles hitherto prohibited, at the following duties, *viz.* 20s. on each horse or ox; 15s. on each cow; 10s. on a calf; 3s. on a sheep; and 5s. on a hog. Fresh meat and salted beef are now admissible at a duty of 8s. per cwt., and bacon and hams at 14s. per cwt. These change, when first announced, produced a complete panic amongst the owners of cattle, which the result has shown to be utterly groundless. Of salt beef and pork there will probably be a constant, and, perhaps, a considerable supply drawn from other countries; but that the British farmer should be alarmed by the most open competition with the cattle of any other country does appear to savour of the ridiculous. Hitherto the whole importation of cattle, up to the end of January, 1843, has amounted to only 4,867 head, of which 3,273 were oxen, 753 cows, 660 sheep, and 181 pigs; a result which proves that the terrors of those who feared, as well as the hopes of those who anticipated an abundance of cheap animal food, under the new tariff, were alike groundless. These imports are understood not to have proved profitable to the im-

porters, and there is nothing in the character of the animals, or in the prices at which they can be sold, to tempt the grazier to prefer them to British cattle. That there were ample causes in operation to produce a great part of the fall in prices of cattle which has occurred is notorious, without attributing it to foreign competition; the most obvious of which was the inducement the high prices at which all kinds of animals had sold for several years offered to their production. This is the view taken of the subject by agricultural writers; for instance, the following passage in the Quarterly Journal of Agriculture of December, 1842, in reference to the fall of prices of live stock in Scotland says: — “That
 “ causes exist sufficiently obvious to account for the
 “ greater part, if not the whole, of the fall in the
 “ price of stock, without calling in the aid of the
 “ tariff, however *it may morally* have affected the
 “ price, we firmly believe. It is well known that all
 “ the cattle-markets have been *more abundantly supplied*
 “ *plied* with stock this than last year. This is a consequence naturally to be expected, from the high
 “ prices of the few years back; but besides this, the
 “ lambing season was so very fine this year that
 “ scarcely a lamb was lost, while last year there were
 “ thousands. This will, partly at least, account for the
 “ recently glutted lamb-fairs of the south of Scotland.
 “ It is well known to graziers that grass has not
 “ fattened well this summer, and this might have been
 “ expected as the effect of long drought upon a soured
 “ state of soil; the condition of the stock has therefore
 “ been low, the contrary of what was the case last
 “ year.” And very similar opinions have been expressed by most of the leading agriculturists at their

various meetings. The cattle panic may, indeed, be said to have fairly passed away. An observation has, however, been made upon the policy which dictated the opening the British markets to foreign meat, whilst it was kept closed against foreign corn, in which I think there is considerable justice and force. It is said, that the tendency of the tariff and corn law, taken together, is to encourage the growth of corn in this country, and, so far as foreign competition goes, to discourage the raising and fattening of cattle, a system of husbandry the very reverse of that which science and recent experience have alike shown to be the most permanently successful; and I have heard no answer thereto from those who approve of the continuance of restriction against corn, and relax that against cattle, for it is a question only between such persons and the extreme protectionists. One of the advantages to the agriculturist of a trade in corn absolutely free, would be, that from time to time, quantities of inferior and low price grain might be imported and applied to cattle feeding to the great increase of the manure heap; now, under the plan actually adopted, this cheap corn must be consumed abroad, and the benefit of our market for the fatted carcase still offered to the foreign grazier.

When the inquiry of 1836 was instituted, at the instance of the landed interest, the agriculturists had been subject for four years to very reduced prices of corn, caused by four favourable seasons, of which 1834 was probably the most prolific of the present century; while, in the four or five years preceding, the crops had been below the average, and in one, at least, had been decidedly deficient. The cycle of about ten years, comprising about one-

half of good and one-half of bad years, had very much a counterpart in the ten years which preceded it: the committee and witnesses of 1836 had the advantage, therefore, of looking back, not only to the great changes consequent on the transition of 1814, but over no less than four or five alternations from abundance to scarcity, and from scarcity to abundance again, in the crops of this country. The committee had passed in review before them three several periods, *viz.* from 1813 to 1816, from 1819 to 1823, and from 1831 to 1836, during each of which, prices of corn in this country were so low, solely from the abundance of the home growth, that the freest corn trade would have made little, if any, reduction in the price of grain; as well as the season of famine in 1816 and 1817, and the dearths and bad harvests of 1827, 1828, and 1829, when, whatever might have been the written letter of the law, no government would have desired or dared to have excluded foreign supplies; for we have seen, that in 1825, 1826, and 1827, when bad crops were feared, although the average had ranged considerably below the then import limit of 80s. a quarter for wheat, the ministers of that day felt it their duty practically to abrogate the corn law by permitting considerable importations of foreign corn. The field of inquiry of that committee had also been cleared of the more pressing evils suffered by the agriculturists from long continued mal-administration of the poor law, which had constituted a topic of so much complaint and embarrassment in 1821 and 1833. The currency question, too, had been practically set at rest, for though one or two members, and a few witnesses, gave

vent to their figments upon that subject, all those advocates of an alteration of the standard, whose opinions were entitled to respect, had become satisfied, that whatever they would have done in 1819, no alteration could, in 1836, have been usefully attempted. Thus Lord Ashburton said, he did not then advise an adjustment of contracts, and that he "did not see any interest any persons could have in the depreciation of the standard, excepting that a debtor might be said to have an interest in defrauding his creditor. Nobody could honestly have any interest in the depreciation of the standard." So Lord Radnor said, "I should see with apprehension any attempt to alter the standard. I believe that all change of the standard would be the source of very great calamity; but if it be done at all, it should be done openly and avowedly as a change of standard, and not covertly and by the issue of paper." This, from their own witnesses, would give any reasoners but the currency doctors a *quietus*; and, practically, they are settled, for they can now obtain no audience for their theories.

There were, therefore, no extraneous topics of diversion under the shadow of which the advocates of protection could shelter or disguise their claim to a monopoly of the British corn market; the inquiry thus became a full and direct examination into the causes of the then low prices, and their effects upon the interest of agriculturists and the progress of husbandry.

The case of distress was opened by the Duke of Buckingham (then Marquis of Chandos), who called a number of farmers from the fertile vales of Buckinghamshire, and the rich wheat lands of Essex and Kent, who came prepared to prove that they could not then

grow wheat with a profit; and many of them stated calculations of the cost of producing an acre of wheat, which, if sold at the prices of the day, would have entailed a loss upon the grower, and that in many cases without reckoning any payment for rent. To a landlord such statements would have been sufficiently startling, had not his every day's experience told him that these witnesses proved too much. The public, not acquainted with the precise condition of agriculture, set down the statements as nicely marshalled calculations made to serve a particular purpose, and ignorance or bad faith has not seldom been imputed to this class of witnesses. I do not think such imputations are merited. These estimates of loss, and the calls for "a remunerating price," came without exception from the occupiers of deep, strong, and, *in favourable seasons*, most fertile land — land so peculiarly adapted to the culture of wheat and beans, that it is usually designated "wheat and bean land," and has been generally applied, almost exclusively, to growing those kinds of grain. Such land suffers much from wet, whether during the season for sowing or subsequently; but in dry years its culture is comparatively easy: then considerable crops may be grown with a small force of manure, and a large return is made for a moderate outlay. Less capital is thought necessary to cultivate land of this description than any other, and from the certainty with which a crop may be grown—subject to the influence of weather—its culture calls for a smaller exercise of skill and judgment on the part of the tenant in the cropping and management of his farm. Such lands have usually been, in the words of the committee of 1833, "old wheat land from time immemorial;" and

this has been one cause of their present comparative inferiority, for during the high prices of the war the only art in farming them consisted in growing wheat as often as possible, a rotation commonly used being fallow, wheat, clover, wheat, beans, thus producing wheat twice in five years, a system which had been but slightly modified down to the investigation of 1836. Before the modern improvements in agriculture, meaning some fifty years ago, these heavy soils constituted practically *the* wheat lands of the country, and upon the suitability of the season to their crops depended the degree of abundance or deficiency felt by the community; but when the growing population, aided by the obstructions of the war, caused the demand for wheat greatly to exceed the supply from the wheat lands, other soils, less fitted by nature for the growth of wheat, were by the application of capital and skill raised into competition with the strong soils in growing wheat. Up to 1814, all and more than all the wheat which could be grown upon land of any description being wanted, the wheat growers of the strong lands did not feel the competition which had been created at home, and their occupiers still continued to look to wheat, and wheat only, for remuneration. Rents, too, were relatively higher on the heavy soils, because from the simplicity in their system of tillage a larger share of the gross produce was, by the economical law which regulates rents, invariably paid to the landlord. Three rents were usually considered sufficient to remunerate the tenant on good wheat land, whilst four and five were the lowest gross return upon which the occupier of the lighter lands based his estimates. This arose from the larger capitals of necessity employed on the latter soils

than on the former. In going through the evidence before the committees of 1821, 1833, and 1836, it is impossible not to be struck with the fact that, as a general rule, the loudest complaints and the largest demands for reductions in rents are made by the occupiers of land the most naturally fertile.

In the rich vales of Somerset, according to Mr. Hanning and others, 25 and 30 per cent. of abatement in rents was absolutely necessary to secure their payment, and even then in low years the farmer's capital was trenched upon; and in Buckinghamshire, Essex, and Kent, rents seem to have been altogether paid out of capital, or the tenants and estates have been ruined together; while on the chalk hills of Wiltshire and Hampshire, rents had not been reduced more than about 10 per cent., and cultivation was in a state of steady progression. In Scotland, more than in most parts of England, the farmers were adapting themselves and their modes of culture to the altered state of prices. The Scotch witnesses, one and all, spoke more hopefully of the prospects of the farmer than the English, and they all found their future expectations of profit upon keeping a large stock of cattle, which, not merely furnished a great supply of manure for the grain crops, but became themselves the source of a profit *which was a clear gain*. Indeed stock keeping has, of late, been so generally admitted to be the basis of good and profitable farming, that to cite the evidence to that effect, given before the committee of 1836, would be a work of supererogation. I shall therefore select my notices of that evidence from the parts which bear upon the assertions so confidently made by the protectionists, that a free trade in corn would throw large tracts of land out of cultivation, and annihilate much

of the rental of Great Britain. I as confidently maintain nothing of the sort would occur. To the farmer it is a matter of indifference whether he pay a high or a low rent, provided it is calculated upon data which one year with another will give a correct average. To that end there must be steady prices; and it is mere trifling to take the prices of ten years, during which the quarter of wheat has been one year at 70s., another at 66s., and in others at 39s. and 46s. a quarter, and, striking an average of the whole, to say the average of the whole period is about 54s. as was lately done by the adherents of the corn law in the House of Commons. That the farmer may make real calculations, and not merely haphazard guesses, as of late years have been necessary, the range of fluctuations in price must be limited to that caused by difference of seasons and nothing will effect that end but to leave the farmers and dealers in corn to the unfettered exercise of their own intelligence, sharpened as it is sure to be by self-interest. Fluctuations in the price of corn raised upon a limited area, as within a single country, necessarily occur from the various character of different seasons, and every restriction, which has the effect of lessening the area from which supplies can be drawn, tends to aggravate such fluctuations. That the corn laws have done so in two ways is admitted; *viz.*, by unnaturally increasing or diminishing the growth of grain in dear or cheap seasons, and by promoted exaggerated speculations upon unfavourable appearances in the growing crops, which sometimes result in large supplies when not actually required, and always cause a great mass of corn to be thrown at once upon the market to the injury of the home grower. With a perfectly free trade, small timely supplies, coming in from week to

week in the ordinary course of commerce, would prevent any great speculation on the growing crops, and would be sure to be closely proportioned to the probable wants of the community. This alone can give such a degree of steadiness to prices as will enable the farmer to make fair calculations for a lease of fourteen or twenty-one years. All the surveyors admitted the great difficulty they had in fixing rents for a long term in advance; and the very general abandonment of leases since 1814, which has taken place in England, more than any thing else proves the hazards which the corn laws have introduced into contracts between landlord and tenant. Tenants have been naturally afraid to bind themselves to money rents calculated at prices which so often eluded their grasp, and landlords have found in nine cases out of ten, that if the rent was too high the lease was binding only on the landlord, often compelling him to stand by whilst an insolvent tenant was scourging his farm by over-cropping, to the permanent deterioration of the land.

It was principally between 1821 and 1833, that the greatest abatements of rent were made, and that tenants had suffered the largest losses of capital; for, by the latter period rents had been in a great measure adjusted, or the weaker tenants had failed; and, in nearly every instance spoken to in 1836, the losses of capital and failure of tenants had occurred on the strong heavy soils, whilst there also had been the chief abatements of rent. Here too the fluctuations in price, and the fall from war prices, had been most severely felt; and much loss was at one time sustained from landlords not meeting the times by reducing the rent *soon enough*. As a sample of the evidence on this

head, I take the testimony of Mr. C. C. Parker, a large farmer in Essex, and extensively employed as a land-agent. He is asked, "what is the condition of the farmers in that part of the county of Essex with which you are well acquainted?" and replied, "the condition of the farmers in part of my neighbourhood has been very bad;" and, on further examination, said, that "since rents had been lowered, not only the new but the old tenants, *having capital*, had decidedly improved the condition of their farms; that the reduction of rents commenced about 1823, beginning with 10 and 15 per cent., and many 20 and 30 per cent., and some 50 per cent., and even more than that within the (then) last three or four years: that he attributed the distressed state of those farmers very materially to the landlords not prudently lowering their rents *earlier than they had done*; and that the total reduction of rent would have been less, if the rents had been lowered sooner." Mr. Parker also observed, that "he knew farms that men of capital were occupying, that were 25s. and 30s. an acre, and they offered a pound; and those farms have been since let for 12s. to 14s., and 15s. an acre; and he believed, that had they been reduced to 1l. at that time, those tenants would then have been in possession of them, and *the farms would never have been impoverished in their cultivation*. It has been by persisting in the high rents, that the farms have been worked out of condition, and then no person would take them except at a very low rent." And he expressly stated, "that he had never seen more improvement in draining, liming, and chalking than within the last three years." This is very instructive: the last

three years referred to by Mr. Parker were those of the very lowest prices, and the farmers *having capital* were directing their attention to precisely those improvements which would permanently ameliorate the texture of their heavy soils, and prepare it for a great increase of stock. Such facts, as those detailed by Mr. Parker, amply confirm all *à priori* reasonings against high prices.

Mr. Parker also said, that there had been a great change of tenantry in Essex, but that the tenants who had left had been either imprudent men, or persons induced by the "very high prices of corn to take farms "without any thing like sufficient capital for the management of them, hoping that if they could survive "one or two harvests the produce of their farms would "give them capital. Many persons were upon their "farms then, whose landlords had met the times by "reduction of rent, whose forefathers had occupied the "same farm from generation to generation, and that "most of them were prudent men and doing well." He also bore testimony to the imprudence of keeping stock, and said, that the only "relief to the farmer" would be "rent being in proportion to the value of "produce."

Such is a fair specimen of the evidence of 1836, for nearly every witness confirmed these views upon some point or other. It should be mentioned, that Mr. Parker was an admirer of the corn laws, though, with his clear appreciation of the necessities of the times, it is difficult to understand upon what grounds.

Abundant testimony was also borne to the importance of draining the heavy lands; and the amount of expenditure in draining and liming solely by the tenant, which it was proved had taken place in Scotland, is quite sur-

prising to English farmers. Farmers here and there in England also had drained their land, and they all spoke to its beneficial effects. Thus, Mr. Ellis, who holds a large farm near Leicester, when asked, "if he had laid out much money upon that farm in draining;" replied, "I have drained nearly every furrow of it that wanted draining, and I should say it all wanted draining except about forty acres." And to the further question, whether that draining paid him a fair interest for his money, he answered, "The best interest that I ever got for any money in my life expended in farming." Now the great obstacle to the practice of draining in England is the enormous expense, amounting according to the Scotch witnesses to 10*l.* and 12*l.* an acre, which will never be incurred by tenants holding only from year to year. Indeed, tile draining partakes so much of a permanent addition to the value of the property, that I think landlords, under any circumstances, should bear a portion of the cost. But though the expense of tile draining may be greater than most tenants in England are prepared to encounter, it does not follow that they must allow their land to remain undrained. Mr. Ellis stated, that he had drained his farm with straw in the way he had seen practised in the county of Essex, and added, "I have a piece of land that has been drained in that manner, which has been in tillage ever since: I grew it with turnips, and I grew it with potatoes; of course there was a good deal of cartage over it, but it was as dry almost as any land you will see during the late wet weather:" and drains so made will last twenty years. Mr. Ellis, also speaking of the superior condition of the farmer on light lands compared with the heavy land tenant, said, "The system of grow-

“ing wheat has altogether changed; I remember
 “twenty-five years ago a notion prevailed that light
 “land would not grow wheat; now, I believe, it is
 “found by experience that moderate light land, barley
 “and turnip land, *will grow upon an average of years*
 “*more wheat than what used to be called the old wheat*
 “*and bean lands.*” Yet Mr. Ellis grows on his strong
 land thirty-six and thirty-eight bushels of wheat per
 acre, and other grain and potatoes in equally large
 proportions. The neighbourhood of Leicester gave
 this gentleman some advantage, as he kept a dairy for
 supplying the town with milk; but he grazed largely
 also, and by growing potatoes and mangold-wurzel,
 heavily manured, in the place of a naked fallow, he
 had a full supply of food for his cattle in winter, and
 a great quantity of manure.

The history of the rise of rent on Mr. Ellis's farm
 shows how the growth of a manufacturing population
 increases the value of the neighbouring land. The
 farm, consisting of 374 acres, was taken in 1806 at a
 rent of 370*l.*; in 1810, it was raised to 444*l.*; in 1826,
 it was again raised to 700*l.* a year, and had been after-
 wards reduced to 650*l.* Within the period here spoken
 of the population of Leicester had increased from
 22,000 to at least 45,000.

Again, Mr. George Robertson, a Scotch farmer and
 land surveyor, said, “The Scotch farmer had always
 “been looking about. When he saw that wheat did
 “not pay, he immediately altered his system; when
 “he found that he had not a remunerating price for
 “wheat *when the preparation was fallow, he took to*
 “*potatoes as a preparation for wheat, and he found that*
 “*profitable both for rearing and feeding cattle for*

“market.” And this is just what the English occupiers of heavy land must do. A neighbour of mine in Hertfordshire, a shrewd and successful farmer, observed to me the other day on the subject of naked fallow, that *“if the land won’t pay to grow a green crop, it will pay less to lie still;”* and, accordingly, he has no summer fallows, and keeps an amount of stock quite unusual in that district.

It was a favourite inquiry with the ultra-protectionists on the committee of 1836 to ask the witnesses what was a remunerating price for wheat, and not a few of them were betrayed into naming 60*s.* or 65*s.* a quarter, or some other unattainable price, and which the rest of their evidence went to show to be quite unnecessary to profitable farming. Of course the farmer, like every other producer, is glad to get the highest possible price for his commodity, and he can hardly be blamed for entertaining a predilection for a law which promises him high prices, until he has found out that such promises are not performed.

When Mr. Robertson was questioned as to the remunerating price of wheat, he said, *“It depends so much upon the rotation adopted, because every crop must be considered as remunerating in its relation to other crops in the rotation; if one crop does not pay in itself, yet perhaps it enables another crop, or the whole crops in the rotation, to pay better, or the whole course of crops to remunerate.”* And the same witness, when asked whether he thought that the farming in England was as perfect as it might be, replied; *“I do not think so. There is one thing that strikes me very strongly as to the management in England, and that is, that generally in large farms*

“ there is a certain portion of grass land devoted ex-
 “ clusively to grazing sheep, the other part of the farm
 “ is under a rotation for cropping far too severe. The
 “ rotation is frequently a six-shift course, *and very few*
 “ *cattle are kept.* It occurs to me, that the rotation
 “ should embrace also a grass course, which would
 “ enable the farmer to rear cattle, to feed them, to con-
 “ sume his straw, and by having a greater portion of
 “ land under turnips and potatoes, to increase the
 “ quantity of dung and improve the quality of it, by
 “ which means the land would be kept in better order.
 “ I cannot see, by the system generally followed by the
 “ English farmer, *how he can get dung for manuring*
 “ *his fallow breaks.*” And he subsequently said, “ I
 “ think the potato husbandry might be introduced on
 “ the cold wet clays of England, after draining, with
 “ advantage ; they may fatten a great deal with pota-
 “ toes.” And further ; “ I think even upon the cold
 “ clays grass might be introduced ; we grow the finest
 “ turnips upon clay land, and the objection to poach-
 “ ing the land is done away with by storing them be-
 “ fore the frost sets in. The turnips carried home are
 “ given to the cattle tied up for fattening, and also to
 “ those in the straw-yards. *Any system of manage-*
 “ *ment upon clay land, without a sufficient quantity of*
 “ *stock, must lead to the ruin of the farmer.*” And yet
 this is the sort of land which is commonly thought to
 be unsuited to stock-farming. The witness also no-
 ticed, that the rot in sheep, so much complained of
 by the English farmers, would be got clear of by pas-
 turing the flock on convertible breaks ; and that pastures
 long grazed by sheep alone get foul, and are improved
 by being pastured with cattle. And a volume might
 be filled with passages to the like effect. Now all

this applies to the deep heavy lands and wet cold clays, which are the only descriptions of land where competition with foreign corn is affected to be much apprehended. The truth is, that such a competition would enforce upon the tenants of those soils that system of husbandry, which would at all times be most permanently advantageous to them : if for every thirty acres of wheat they now sow, they were to substitute twenty acres of wheat and ten of mangold-wurzel, potatoes, or grass, for feeding cattle, they would obtain a far greater proportionate profit on their wheat land, with the profit of feeding or rearing cattle besides.

As a practical illustration of the benefits derived from sowing a more moderate breadth of wheat than is usual in England, I may mention the practice of a most successful farmer, who observed to me the other day, that he considered the mere amount of rent as a matter of comparatively little importance, for that the farmer's profits must depend upon his method of cultivation ; and he referred to his own system as an example. His farm consists of a stiff and naturally retentive clay soil, which, to use his own expression, "is unkindly but not ungrateful." The course commonly adopted in the neighbourhood is fallow (generally a naked one), wheat, clover, wheat, beans ; a rotation, which, notwithstanding the application of a good deal of London manure, is far too scourging, and, accordingly, from twenty-five to twenty-eight bushels an acre is esteemed a fair crop. My friend's system is altogether different. His land has been well drained, and he never uses a naked fallow ; his preparation for wheat is two years of fallow or green crops, in succession, as, for instance, winter tares after clover, and rape, &c.

to be fed off after turnips, then wheat, followed by oats, with which the clover is sown. One half of the tares and turnips are fed off by sheep fattening on corn and oil cake, the other half being taken away for stall feeding cattle, and for working horses; many Welsh cattle are also fed yearly. By this system, the produce of wheat is most extraordinary. Once during the last fifteen years, the wheat crop averaged fifty-one bushels per acre; another year fifty bushels; and it has always been considerably over forty bushels to the acre. In one year the wheat crop (wheat and straw) produced in money 25*l.* per acre, and that in a year of not very high prices. Well might this gentleman say "that twenty acres of *good wheat* would pay the rent "of three hundred acres of land." And the same farm also furnishes a proof that such high produce can only be kept up by a steady perseverance in high farming, for the gentleman I have mentioned, being about to quit, has, during the last three years, taken peas and beans instead of pursuing his former plan of a second green or fallow crop, and he says the produce of wheat has already sensibly diminished, and that another round of crops on the same system would, as he believes, bring down his wheat crop to thirty bushels an acre. His neighbours have frequently wondered that he had the patience to wait so long for wheat; but the result has fully proved the advantages of such patient abstinence. It is clearly better to have one acre of wheat of fifty bushels, than two of twenty-five, or even thirty bushels each, for half the seed and other expenses of preparation are saved in the former case, while the second acre of land remains available for some other crop.

Few persons are aware of even the money value of the manure that is made during a winter from a few cattle tied up or in yards. I may mention, as an instance on a small scale, that I last year had three milch cows tied up and kept on hay, grains, and roots, two heifers in the straw-yard getting little besides straw, three weaning calves, two breeding sows, and an old jobbing cart-horse, more frequently running in the paddock than either in the yard or the stable; and besides this, one horse was kept in the stable for private use. Being about to remove at Michaelmas we had no use for the manure, and it was from time to time sold, as it accumulated in inconvenient quantities. Now, the manure made by these few animals sold for within a few shillings of *fifty pounds*. All this was made in the yard without poaching the land, or in any way interfering with the routine of tillage. When stock-keeping shall be more generally introduced upon heavy land, there will be a tendency in the rents of such lands again to rise more nearly upon a par with those of lighter lands, from the permanent improvement the former description of soils will derive from a more generous system than heretofore in use.

The condition of the light land farmer, as disclosed before the committee of 1836, even under the low prices of 1834 and 1835, was hopeful and improving. Thus, Lord Radnor, who resides much in the light land district about Salisbury in Wiltshire, said, he "did not think the agricultural interest otherwise than in a flourishing condition, except where long leases were running, fixed at high rents, which occasioned distress; but, generally speaking, he did not believe agriculture to be distressed." Again, his Lordship, in answer

to a question whether "the return to cash payments
 "had prejudiced the cause of agriculture generally,"
 replied, "Not at all: my belief is, that the science of
 "agriculture has never ceased to go on progressively
 "flourishing ever since I can remember, and it is pro-
 "gressing now as much as ever. I rather think that,
 "there has been a great start within this year or two
 "particularly; there has been greater activity in drain-
 "ing, which is one great symptom of improvement in
 "agriculture." His Lordship further said, "the agricul-
 "tural labourer was then better off than at any time in his
 "Lordship's lifetime." He also said, that his own rents
 had been adjusted, and were then principally corn rents,
 a system which some of the Scotch witnesses described
 as having been the salvation of the Scotch tenantry.
 Corn rents were extensively adopted in Scotland in
 1822 and 1823, and they have certainly assisted the
 farmers of that part of the kingdom, more than any thing
 besides, to pass through the fluctuations of the subse-
 quent years uninjured, though as I shall presently
 show, that corn is often, as regards the landlord, an un-
 fair measure of the value of a farm. With reference to
 light land he said, "a great deal of land was brought into
 "cultivation on the high downs of Wiltshire on account
 "of the high prices, which are now in cultivation, *and*
 "*are increasing in cultivation every day*; and that is
 "very much owing to the improvement of agriculture."
 And both Lord Radnor and Lord Ashburton—both
 large owners of light land—expressed opinions that
 legislative enactment could not help the landed in-
 terest; the latter saying emphatically, "I really do not
 "know any thing you can do for the agriculturists, but

“ to tell them honestly that no parliamentary relief is possible.”

This committee could not agree upon any report, but the chairman, Mr. Shaw Lefevre (the present Speaker of the House of Commons), proposed a report holding out those hopeful views and sound conclusions which the evidence so fully justified. He afterwards published the substance of his intended report in the form of a letter to his constituents. That letter has been widely circulated ; but I must quote a few brief passages from it to show what conclusions were necessarily drawn from the evidence, for though a majority dissented from their chairman's report, they tacitly admitted its accuracy by abstaining from making any substituted report.

X. 6. Mr. Lefevre said, the distress was “ in a great measure confined to the occupiers of cold tenacious soils, “ and to those farmers who rely upon their wheat crop “ as their main source of profit.” And he particularly referred to the modern improvement of light lands, which had rendered them fit “ to produce wheat at a “ less cost to the cultivator than the more tenacious “ soils ;” to the abundant crops of 1833, 1834, and 1835, as almost entirely the cause of the depression of prices ; and to the fact that the corn laws had prevented the adjustment of rent sufficiently early. He further observed, that the yearly tenant was quite as dependent upon his landlord, upon a fall in prices, as the holder of a lease, “ because he (the yearly tenant) can- “ not realise the same amount for his stock as when “ he entered upon his farm ; and he will rather sub- “ mit to the payment of too high a rent, in the hope

“of a recurrence of high prices, than hazard the loss of a considerable portion of his capital by a sale.” The advantages both in Scotland and England, which had been proved to have resulted from stock farming, and the permanent improvements effected by draining, subsoil ploughing, with the consequent extension of turnip husbandry to clay soils, are severally noticed as leading to the conclusions at which he had arrived; *viz.* that with energy, skill, and capital, farmers had little to fear from low prices; and that the best thing the legislature could do for the agriculturists was to free their trade from shackles imposed by impolitic laws, and to avoid delusion and disappointment by any attempts to keep up artificially the prices of agricultural produce. These are the conclusions of a gentleman, who is not only a cautious and enlightened politician, but one of the most skilful practical farmers of the day.

Such having been the really hopeful state of agriculture in 1836, after four years of unusually low prices, we have since had the experience afforded by a cycle of four indifferent seasons with the accustomed concomitant, high prices of grain, which have led to the legislative changes stated at the commencement of this section. One moderately fruitful season and large importations have again brought low prices, and judging from former experience we must soon expect to hear reiterated complaints of agricultural distress. A material change has, however, occurred amongst the agriculturists themselves, since the publication of the evidence of 1836, for though no report was made, that evidence was felt to have been decisive against any claim to parliamentary interference; and up to the session of 1842, the efforts of the agriculturists were con-

fined to the defence of the then existing corn law. From circumstances before alluded to, those efforts completely failed, and I have reason to think there is a growing wish, amongst the occupiers at all events, that the question should be set at rest by an entire removal of all restrictions on the importation of foreign corn. Such opinions have been expressed to me in the most unqualified manner by several farmers, who took the very active parts at the last general election in support of adherents of Sir Robert Peel, *upon the single ground of his assumed intention to maintain the corn law intact.*

Having thus shown, that legislative restriction has neither enabled the landed interest to retain the monopoly of the British corn market, nor to protect the British corn grower from prices falling at times to a level with, or even below, those of the Continent; and that such restriction has been coincident with the most violent fluctuations in price, and the severest pressure upon the consumer, it remains only briefly to trace what, in 1836, appeared to the witnesses, practically versed in the corn trade, to be the working of the corn law. And, finally, I propose to offer some suggestions, applicable to both landlord and tenants, on the probable operation of free trade in corn upon British agriculture.

Mr. James Fison, a corn and wool merchant in Norfolk, and whose business led him to be well acquainted with the condition of farmers in Norfolk, Suffolk, and parts of Essex and Cambridgeshire, stated, that the then low price of wheat had been caused by the abundant supply from the crops of 1833, 1834, and 1835, and he was inclined to estimate those three crops as equal to *four* average years. There was a great return

per acre by reason of the fine season, a great increase in the number of acres sown, and the grain was of a superior quality, producing more flour than in average years. Here we have the simple effect of three successive good years producing, by mere home competition, such low prices of grain, that a large body of the agriculturists thought some additional interference in their favour on the part of the legislature was indispensable. But it very soon became obvious, that previous interference and the then existing corn laws had mainly contributed to occasion that distress of which the farmers complained. A premium on wheat growing had been promised by law in securing to the British grower a monopoly of the best market in the world; and when the stimulus thereby created co-operated with three fine seasons, the competition of British wheat growers alone was amply sufficient to reduce prices to the lowest point. Independently of corn laws, a succession of warm and dry seasons—which are always the favourable years for wheat in this country—have a tendency to promote the sowing of a large breadth of wheat, from the circumstance of the farmer being enabled in such years to prepare his ground for the seed with considerable advantage; and when those seasons follow a high range of prices, an undue proportional growth of wheat is inevitable. Against this cause of low prices, the extremest advocate of restriction scarcely ventures to suggest a parliamentary protection; yet the history of the corn trade has shown, that the probable occurrence of cycles of abundant years, of far longer duration than that of 1833, 1835, is never to be overlooked as an element in estimating the future prices of grain. Improvements in agricul-

ture are year by year increasing the productive powers of good seasons, and probably counteracting, to a certain extent, the effects of unfavourable ones; but in cold wet years, such as constantly recur—most frequently several in succession—nothing can prevent an exorbitant rise of price in this densely peopled kingdom, but the knowledge that a foreign supply can be instantly and certainly obtained. Now the corn laws interpose such obstacles to the supply of corn in years when our own harvests are defective, and postpone *all* external supply until prices indicate so great a degree of scarcity, or alarm of scarcity, that, independently of the suffering and loss high prices of food always occasion, all the ordinary operations of commerce are deranged. This is generally admitted, and has been so often clearly proved, that it is unnecessary to do more than advert to it.

But though the corn law restrictions, by giving to the agriculturists in ordinary seasons a complete monopoly of the home market, are the immediate cause of those occasionally high prices which form the basis upon which land surveyors, and farmers themselves, calculate their rents and other fixed money outgoings, they are utterly inoperative in abundant seasons. Mr. Fison, whose means of observation had been so extensive, after stating his opinion, that the corn laws operated very unfavourably to the occupiers of the soil, thus described their effect:—"They give a
 " complete monopoly of the market, promising, as it
 " were, in consequence of that monopoly, high prices,
 " which promise they cannot realise, that is very
 " evident. Then they operate again to his disad-
 " vantage, because there is always some latent hope,

“ that though prices are low now, they will advance
 “ under the restrictive system ; and thus it is, that if
 “ the farmer goes to his landlord when he has
 “ lost money in one year, and relates the case, the
 “ landlord, perhaps, deducts 10 or 15 per cent., but
 “ the landlord entertains a similar hope which the
 “ farmer does, that the corn laws will help him at some
 “ future time, though they do not at present, and,
 “ therefore, he will not make a permanent reduction
 “ in the rent ; and if the next year happens to be a
 “ pretty good one, the tenant goes again, hoping for a
 “ similar reduction : the landlord turns round and
 “ says, No, you are now making better prices, and I
 “ shall not allow you this reduction of rent.” And the
 same witness, when asked whether the farmers could
 grow wheat in competition with the growers of corn
 on the Continent, replied, “ Yes ; with the increased
 “ intelligence that is going abroad, they would be
 “ ultimately able to do that, because I do not contem-
 “ plate that our prices are to go down to the prices of
 “ the Continent, but that the prices of the Continent
 “ will more nearly approximate to our prices ;” and he
 added, in illustration, “ there are two articles of agri-
 “ cultural produce which are not protected by high
 “ import duties ; those two articles are rape-seed and
 “ wool, and both are selling at fair prices.” The
 examination then went on —

“ Do you think it would be possible, with wheat at
 “ 40s. a quarter, for the farmers to grow wheat to any
 “ extent ? Yes, I do.”

“ What reason have you for supposing the farmer,
 “ supposing his rent to be fixed at a proper level,
 “ could cultivate wheat at 40s. a quarter ? *Rent I*

“consider only the residue. It is necessary to deter-
 “mine what is the proper level before that question
 “can be answered*. I know farmers, young, enter-
 “prising, skilful men, who say they can grow wheat at
 “40s. a quarter, and who are doing very well
 “now, having sold a part of their crop at 40s. a
 “quarter; *but those are young men of skill and*
 “intelligence; and the fact is, they make their rent, or
 “nearly so, by stock. *The great error of the old race*
 “*of farmers is, that they go, as it is called, to the barn-*
 “*door for every thing.* Now I had an illustration of
 “that the other day: there is a person I know
 “very well, a shopkeeper, a man of property; there
 “was a farmer near him, who held a farm of two hun-
 “dred acres of land, an industrious plodding man, but
 “he could not get a living, and he was literally
 “obliged to give it up from his losses. This person
 “who lived near, a man of business, said he should
 “like to try it, and they told him ‘Well, if you give
 “the same price that he did, which was 1*l.* an acre,
 “you shall have it, and we shall be very glad if you
 “will.’ He took it upon a lease of 1*l.* an acre, but
 “employing double or treble the capital which the
 “other tenant employed, he has made it answer his
 “purpose exceedingly well; in proof of which, the
 “agent of the estate said that he was *very sorry he*
 “*had given this person a lease of it at 20s., for the*
 “*farm was now so improved, that he could make 30s.*
 “*an acre of it*”—an observation, by the bye, which
 said but little for the intelligence of the agent, *as with-*

* See p. 148, as to the comparative unimportance of rent to a good farmer.

out the lease the improvement would never have taken place. And Mr. Fison again said, "I have known repeated instances of old tenants that have left their farms because they could not live upon them; farming, comparatively, without stock, and employing very little capital. Young men have come and taken those farms, and have done exceedingly well upon them by employing a great deal more capital, and conducting their affairs in a more intelligent and skilful manner." With reference to rape-seed, Mr. Fison thought the demand for it in this country was as certain as the demand for corn, and that the price was then full as high as the average price when there was a protecting duty of 40s. a quarter. This witness also said landlords had not looked sufficiently to persons of capital; they have thought more of the present advantage of a high rent than of the ultimate result to themselves in having persons of capital upon their estates; and he again and again reiterated what every other witness confirmed, that the chief distress existed amongst the occupiers of heavy soils. So Mr. Ellis, to whose evidence I have before referred, thought the corn law "gave the farmers an expectation that something is to come to their relief that can never arrive; and on that account it holds up the value of land fictitiously."

Such then were the views, with regard to the corn law, which had begun to be entertained by the more intelligent farmers and corn dealers in the great corn growing districts. I must now shortly advert to the evidence of two other witnesses engaged in the corn trade.

Mr. Rogers Ruding, principally engaged as a corn

factor in the import trade, said, "The (then) corn law
 "tended entirely to prevent our having a supply from
 "abroad, *except in cases of actual scarcity*; that it
 "was far from keeping a steady price, because at the
 "time of importation we necessarily have high prices;
 "and, immediately after the importation has taken
 "place, it alarms the agriculturists, who generally
 "send a large portion of the corn to market and occa-
 "sion a reaction. We have then low prices, and in
 "the event of good harvests very low prices indeed."
 And the whole scope of his evidence went to show,
 that by lowering the importation limit the great fluctua-
 tions we have hitherto experienced would be pre-
 vented: for instance, he is asked, "What would be the
 "effect of lowering the import price in bad harvests?
 "In bad harvests it would secure a regular supply of
 "foreign corn with less fluctuation of price to the
 "public.

"But with no proportionate increase of the price
 "of British corn? I do not consider that it would
 "prevent a proportionate rise in British corn. If
 "you have a bad harvest in this country *the foreign*
 "*supply, which would be trifling, would only prevent*
 "*enormously high prices.* The great alteration from
 "high to low prices has been chiefly from a succession
 "of abundant crops after importation, and sometimes
 "from erroneous ideas of the excess of produce, not from
 "excessive importations." And afterwards, in reply to
 a question as to the effect of importations after a bad har-
 vest "checking," what the examiner designated, "the
 "fair price that the English farmer ought to have, from
 "having less corn than he had before?" replied, that "of
 "course any foreign importation would check the price

“ of the English farmer, and therefore would not be beneficial to him ; but with a crop of three quarters instead of four, *let the importation be the largest ever known, the farmer would be certain of high prices as a remuneration for his short crop.*” Mr. Ruding also stated, that 10s. a quarter was the proper sum to be estimated as the expense of bringing wheat from the Baltic, except where the importer could sell it at once from the ship without the cost of landing and warehousing, that corn is occasionally subject to much damage in its passage, and that the rate of insurance varies according to the season from 6*d.* to 2*s.* a quarter.

Mr. Hayes, who had long been extensively engaged in trade as a miller, in reference to the foreign corn trade, said, “ Foreign wheat, of the average quality of British red wheat, might have been bought in Dantzic (during the cheap years preceding 1836) at 23*s.* a quarter, *in the absence of all demand ; but if you had wanted to have bought 10,000 quarters you would have raised the price immediately.*” And the same witness being asked what he would conceive to be a prohibitory fixed duty, answered, “ *It depends upon the nature of the crop you have in this country.*” In many other respects he confirmed the testimony of other witnesses, and he fully agreed that the protection afforded to the farmer by the corn law was fallacious.

If then, as appears by the concurrent testimony of the great majority of witnesses examined before the committee of 1836, the principal effect of the then corn law was to postpone foreign importations in seasons of scarcity until prices became exorbitant, generally followed by a speedy reaction depressing the price, especially when coincident with a good harvest,

below what would have been the natural rate with an unrestricted trade; if rents were fixed upon erroneous data; and if capital was misdirected in attempts to grow wheat on land not adapted for it, or to grow it too often on the soils, once called *par excellence* "wheat lands;" and if the consequence was to induce the occupiers of heavy soils — for it applies almost exclusively to them — to calculate upon returns which they never realise, and their landlords to demand rents the tenants could not permanently pay, whilst the power of the community to consume agricultural produce of all kinds is confessedly diminished by the corn laws, it would seem that in trusting to restrictive enactments and monopoly, rather than to the intelligent enterprise of British capitalists, the landed interests grasp at a shadow, and in so doing risk no small portion of the substance of their wealth.

There is nothing more instructive than the fact, that the tenants of light lands had nowhere—in north, south, east, and west alike—suffered from low prices in any thing like the same degree as the occupiers of the heavy soils, nor had the rents of land of the former kind fallen from their high range of 1812 in any proportion to those of the latter sort. It was to protect the heavy lands that the corn laws had been enacted; the lighter lands had a physical limit to their capacity for wheat growing, imposed by the absolute impossibility of producing it without long and careful preparation, to which ample capitals with numerous flocks or herds were indispensable.

In the result the light land farmer grew nearly as much wheat per acre—perhaps more, taking the average of seasons—as the heavy land cultivator; and though the wheat of the former was undoubtedly an important

part of his produce, it formed *only* a part of his routine, and was kept in due subordination to a general system. On the other hand, the heavy land farmer staked his all upon his wheat crop; and his power, either to meet his rent or his other fixed money engagements, depended altogether upon the price that grain might realise: necessity dictated in the one case what prudence would have counselled in the other, had not the natural law of supply and demand been interfered with by restrictive regulations.

I think Colonel Thompson somewhere speaks of an observation made to him on a coach by a Lincolnshire farmer, "that all the rich farmers were found upon "poor land;" and as a general rule that is very nearly the truth, for no man thinks of undertaking the cultivation of a tract of light land without a full supply of capital, whereas the apparent facility of production upon heavier and richer soils tempts men not only to engage in farming them with too little capital, but to offer as rent too large a proportion of the anticipated produce. I am convinced that at this moment the estimation in which the heavy lands of secondary qualities are held is too low; first, because their occupiers have been unduly stimulated to look exclusively to wheat for profit; next, because they are generally occupied by a poor and unenterprising class of tenants; and thirdly, because the great competition which exists for farms has led the occupiers to make engagements for money rents, calculated upon expectations of the produce of abundant years and the prices of deficient seasons. These two conditions never happen together, and one way or the other the clay land tenant always suffers. Let the season be wet, and the crops on the heavy

lands will ever be the most defective, and, though the price may be high, the low land farmer has either comparatively little wheat to sell, or its quality is so inferior that it fetches nothing: again, if there be a succession of dry years, when the deep lands are the most productive, the price falls so low that *all* the produce would barely realise the money rent, which has been calculated on a far higher range of prices. Now most of these miscalculations are directly attributable to the corn laws, and the way in which they have created a progressively increasing deterioration of such soils is described by Mr. Fison, who said the stiff land farms had been overcropped in consequence of the rents being kept up too high, and that the occupiers “*had paid their landlords what they ought to have paid their labourers: if they had paid it to their labourers they would have had value for the money, whereas they paid it to the landlord, and of course they had nothing back, and they have so much less to lay out upon their farms.*” The inevitable consequence of the state of things here described must be the ruin of the tenants, when the land would be thrown upon the landlords’ hands worked out and impoverished.

I have said there is an apparent facility of cultivating clay land with small means, which increases the number of competitors for farms of that kind, and ultimately degrades the system of cultivation adopted upon them. This has been clearly and graphically brought out in a note by that intelligent agriculturist, Mr. H. Handley, appended to a review of the “*Progress of Agricultural Knowledge during the last four years,*” in the last part of the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, wherein he says,

“ A main reason why clay farms have to a considerable extent fallen into ‘ inferior hands,’ is the circumstance that they are the only farms which, from the moderate outlay required to enter, come within the reach of a certain class. If, for instance, a farming servant or cottager, either by marriage, bequest, or a long course of industry, shall have become possessed of a few hundred pounds, and desire to be himself an occupier, he is debarred from entering upon a grazing, a mixed, or convertible farm, by the capital necessary to purchase stock or artificial manures ; but for a small clay-farm a team of horses and a few implements are alone necessary. He ploughs, sows, and reaps, and converts his straw into what he calls manure by the mouths and feet of a few starved calves or yearlings mainly aided by the winter rains, and then carts it on his land little better than rotted straw. No wonder the condition of small clay-farms should be low. Yet however disagreeable the enumerated drawbacks to a clay-farm, and I admit they are many, *there is none more grateful for capital expended*, either in draining or manure. Once drained, the art of clay-farming consists in the art of ploughing and the art of making manure. If, on the one hand, the clays could advantageously share their superfluous moisture to the thirsty, gravelly, or sandy soils, on the other hand they do not burn, like these, under a summer sun, and at all events retain, until required by the crop, whatever manure is put into them.”

The reader, who has perused the foregoing pages, will be aware how much this seeming facility of production, this, so to speak, natural tendency to an undue growth of wheat on clay farms has been aggravated by the corn law.

That the corn laws do not benefit the *occupiers* of land was expressly stated by most of the witnesses, and was tacitly admitted by the rest of those who gave evidence in 1836 ; and it is, therefore, perfectly obvious, that in the long run they cannot benefit the landlord. True it is, that where land has been let to a responsible tenant, though at a rent which the course of events has shown to be too high, the full amount may be exacted to the end of the lease ; and, in such cases, landlords may be satisfied to receive the stipulated pay-

ments, and trust to some turn of fortune in their favour at its expiration. Yet, even in such cases, the land will assuredly be overcropped and deteriorated, though the tenant may avoid legal breaches of the covenants of his lease. In other cases, if periods of low prices become frequent, as they probably will in spite of any corn law, tenants of inferior skill and small capital will sink under the pressure, unless it shall become plain both to landlords and tenants, that a new system and additional exertions are required. This, however, will not happen so long as either party retains a delusive reliance upon a law nominally protecting.

I firmly believe, that if the trade in corn was to be thrown open to-morrow, that there would be no real necessity for any important reduction of rents, except upon heavy wheat land ; and there, it would only be required in order to allow the tenant time to adapt himself to a state of low prices likely to be permanent and steady, rather than from any difficulty in cultivating such lands, under a proper system, at the present rents, let the price of corn be ever so low. I would not advise the owners of such lands to consent to any lasting or serious abatements of rent under a temporary alarm ; they had better allow a yearly sum to be laid out in draining or other permanent improvements of a similar kind ; and in all future changes of tenants they must select the men of enterprise and capital to occupy their land, even at a few shillings per acre less rent than might be obtained from a less responsible and intelligent tenant. Experience, however, has shown, that the most skilful tenants and farmers who have the largest capital, are generally able and willing to give the

highest rents. And it is reasonable that they should do so; for though the proportion of the gross produce raised upon any farm, which the man of capital will pay as rent, is less than the proportion paid by the inferior kind of tenant, yet the actual value of the landlord's share — the rent — will be higher, from the circumstance that the able capitalist will raise, perhaps, double the gross produce grown by the poor tenant. There are many estates on which the proprietor is unwilling to displace a tenant, though he is known to be cultivating his land in an indifferent manner; and I am satisfied, that to such feelings a considerable amount of rent is often sacrificed, though the oscillations of prices under the corn laws have hitherto prevented a clear perception of the fact, that, as a general rule, such sacrifices seldom avail much to the tenant's benefit. Free trade would dissipate all delusions of this kind. Landowners would understand that poor and slovenly farmers could no more compete with those of skill, capital, and activity, than a careless, bungling, or needy tradesman can rival one of contrary character. If, as a matter of feeling or pride, landlords allow their estates to be occupied by bad farmers, because they have been tenants a long time, the loss will be apparent, and capable of distinct appreciation.

Notwithstanding the pertinacity with which the landed interest have clung to the corn laws, there are symptoms abroad which show, that landlords are beginning to understand that rents have not in reality been kept up by such legislative protection. Thus, the Duke of Richmond, whose threat to unmake the present administration if the corn law were touched is well remembered, said to his Scotch tenants the other

day, "That if any of his tenants shall next year find
 "himself placed in a disadvantageous position
 "from these changes [the corn law and tariff of 1842],
 "*I feel myself bound, as a man of honour, to accept his*
 "*resignation* ; for I am not the man to let my lands, in
 "1840, under an old state of things, and hold the
 "tenant to his engagement for nineteen years under a
 "new state of things." All this seems very fair and
 reasonable, and was of course received at the rent
 feast with vociferous applause. But what has the
 Duke of Richmond, what have the great majority of
 landlords been doing since 1815 but letting their lands
 under one state of things, and holding, with more or
 less tenacity, their tenants "to their engagements,
 "under a new state of things?" How was it that land-
 surveyors, from 1815 to 1828, let their employers'
 lands under the idea that wheat, as guaranteed by act
 of Parliament, was to sell for 80s. a quarter, while,
 "in the real state of things," the tenants often netted
 little more than half that price? Such has not been the
 accidental or occasional state of things, but a constant,
 abiding system of alternation, which periodically sub-
 jected the tenant to the performance of engagements,
 when his produce sold low, which had been contracted
 under the expectation that it would sell high. No doubt
 landlords in particular localities have made large abate-
 ments of rent, but seldom in time for the tenants' safety
 and their own interest ; and many of them, when the
 promises of their corn law have proved as faithless as
 lovers' vows, like the Duke of Richmond, have felt
 themselves bound, as men of honour, to accept the
 resignation of tenants. And what an alternative does
 this present to the tenant? He must sell off in a period

of the lowest prices, to go into business again when perchance the corn law swing is at its highest. I have myself often heard a landlord meet the tenant's plain demonstration by figures, that the rent calculated on high prices ought not to be paid in full when prices had fallen, by the bluff retort, "I am willing to take your farm off your hands." And landed proprietors well know that so great is the competition for farms, that, except under peculiar circumstances, such as the cases of very poor tenants on wet clay lands, they may safely offer such an alternative in cheap years to a farmer of capital. This certainly proves the landlord's belief, that his farm is not overlet, notwithstanding a reduction of prices, and it is with that view I have quoted the Duke of Richmond's speech; but is it any equivalent to the tenant for the failure of that basis upon which all his estimates have been made? Land-agents and farmers are alike able, by the aid of local information, to calculate very nicely what the yearly produce of a farm in its actual state is likely to be, whilst the tendency of valuers is to overlook accidental losses and deficiencies, which, in practice, are sure to occur, for the number of candidates for a farm is so great, that such minor errors in the calculation are sure to be overlooked by the farmer; and the landlord naturally regards with favour those *employées* who succeed in obtaining the highest rents.

The great competition for farms, which existed in the period of the very low prices preceding 1836, is mentioned by a great many witnesses. Thus Mr. Ellis, in reply to the question, "Supposing there were any farms out of occupation at this moment, do you think there would be many applicants for them?" said, "Yes, I think there is as great demand for

“land now as there almost ever was; but very little land has changed hands for the last two years.”

Mr. Fison also assigned as one cause of the then depressed state of farmers on stiff lands, “the very great competition that there was for farms,” and added, “that is an acknowledged cause: when I have been conversing with farmers, for instance, at the market table at Bury St. Edmund’s, a persons its there who is a land valuer; he was telling me a short time since, that they had a greater number of applications for farms than they had had for many years before: he said he had sixteen then on his list very pressing applications; and he added, ‘What appears very curious to me is, that the majority of them are applications from persons that have small farms of 100 or 200 acres begging me to get them larger ones.’”

It will be obvious that such a degree of competition, as is here indicated, will compel farmers to offer the highest rents—in other words, the largest share of the gross produce—which they can possibly afford, after deducting the expense of cultivation with the lowest rate of profit; and, therefore, if it were possible by means of the corn laws or otherwise (which I have shown it is not) to secure permanently high prices for grain, the farmer would obtain no benefit, the pressure of competition compelling him to offer, as rent to the landlord, the uttermost farthing of the *residuum* which would remain after the deduction of expenses and the lowest profit. It is useless to adduce either arguments or authorities to prove that the general rate of profit in this country has long been exceedingly low; or that, from manifest causes, the ordinary rate of profit upon

capital employed in agriculture is lower than that of capital engaged in any other business. The farmer, in making his calculations for taking land, must reckon upon offering as rent a very large proportion of its anticipated produce, and can only look for more than the lowest returns for his own capital and industry by increasing the gross produce of his land.

The only element in the calculation of a money rent then remaining is the price of produce, which, if it depended solely upon the variations in seasons, might be calculated to within a reasonable degree of certainty. But when prices are sometimes reduced to the lowest point through the great competition amongst the home growers, unnaturally stimulated by the corn laws—at others, by a sudden influx of foreign grain, the accumulated surplus of years—and are occasionally forced up to a range almost indicating famine—no calculations of price, which have the least pretension to accuracy, can be made. Surveyors, examined in 1821, 1833, and 1836, invariably stated the difficulty they found in fixing the prices of grain, for the actual prices have never squared with those promised by any of the successive corn laws. The tenant, however, may be certain, that in this state of doubt and difficulty the inclination of the balance, under pressure of competition amongst farmers, will be in favour of the proprietor. The tenant will never have the benefit of the doubt. Landlords, land-agents, and farmers, then, have been alike deceived and betrayed by corn laws; and the mischief of all reliance upon protecting duties is, that the protected interests, instead of putting their own shoulders to the wheel, always entertain lingering hopes that some act of Parliament remedy may relieve them from the consequences of their miscalculations.

The Scotch witnesses, who were examined in 1836, regarded the conversion of money rents into corn rents as one very important ingredient in their success; and certainly, under the operation of the corn laws, they were quite justified in saying that the change had been the salvation of the tenantry. But a rent measured by the price of corn is by no means, at all times and under all circumstances, fair towards the landlord. Upon stock farms, as several witnesses pointed out, the price of corn is no just measure of the amount of rent; and in proportion as land has approached the character of stock farms has been the success of the tenant and the maintenance of rents. I have reason to believe, that tenants are very generally becoming anxious to have their rents converted into corn rents; and, if the corn laws are to be maintained, such a conversion can alone save them from severe loss and distress in times of low prices: but are the landlords prepared for that result from their cherished protective duties? To show the landlords the hazard they run when they really embark with their tenants and unite in staking their incomes year by year upon the corn law prices, and which under a corn rent they must do, I will refer to Mr. Robert Hope's evidence, who said, that his rent, a corn rent fluctuating with the price of corn—was in the year 1835 within 10% of the money rent paid by his father in 1793 for the same farm! Nobody pretends to say that such a reduction was necessary, even with the low prices of 1835, for improvements in land and in the art of husbandry have greatly increased the productive powers of all land since 1793.

Another witness, Mr. Brodie, showed, that on a farm, which he had taken in 1822 at the yearly rent of 1,500*l.*, his payments in the aggregate to 1835 would

have amounted to 21,000*l.*, but from which he had been allowed abatements, commencing in 1827, amounting in the whole to 1,575*l.*, making his actual payments for rent 19,425*l.*; if it had been taken at the equivalent corn rent he had offered, he would have paid an aggregate of 16,125*l.* only, the actual receipts in fourteen years forming *a difference in favour of the landlord* of 3,300*l.* beyond what he would have received under a corn rent. The table, produced by Mr. Brodie to show the difference between his money rent and a corn rent, proves, that the price of corn has not come up to the estimates made by farmers themselves. Mr. Brodie said he took the average crops of wheat of 1818 and 1819, and estimating *the price at 70s. 3d.* a quarter, brought the rent to the sum agreed on, 1,500*l.* Now the rent he would have paid under a corn rent, that is, *if the expectations on which he founded his offer had made the actual basis of his contract*, would in no one year from 1822 to 1835, both inclusive, have amounted to 1,500*l.* The highest year was 1828 (a very bad season), when the grain was of most inferior quality, the corn rent would have been 1,497*l.* 16*s.* 8*d.*; only two other years reach 1,300*l.* and a fraction; three more are between 1,200*l.* and 1,300*l.*; three others between 1,100*l.* and 1,200*l.*; and three others are below 900*l.* And to this conclusion it must come, if the landed interest require their tenants' fortunes to be staked upon the fluctuating price of wheat under a law restrictive of importation.

Persons, who have not had a practical acquaintance with the management of landed property, have little idea of the immense difference there may be in the value of a farm in the hands of a good or a bad tenant,

or of the extent to which a skilful farmer improves a property whilst seeking only his own individual profit. As an example, not many days ago I found that a farmer of my acquaintance, a man of skill and considerable opulence, was looking out for a fresh farm, and on inquiring the reason he quitted his present occupation, which is in high condition, I learned that a lease of fourteen years was just expiring, and that the landlord wanted 40s. an acre for the same farm which had before been let at 10s. an acre, whilst the tenant was not willing to give more than about 25s. the acre. Another person had, however, been found to take it at 30s., just three times the rent at which it had been let fourteen years ago. True, the farm was then much out of condition; part of it is rather cold clay land, and the previous occupier had "ploughed, sowed, and reaped," till he scarcely got seed for seed; and the now going off tenant had made large and spirited outlays upon the farm, which he does not deny to have been amply returned to him during the currency of the lease. Probably there are few parishes in England in which, to some extent, the same sort of thing is not of occasional occurrence. One farmer shall make a good living at a high rent on a farm, which another could not have occupied with a profit had he lived rent free. But when these things are fully understood, which they are now beginning to be, the landed interest can never expect the country to submit to be taxed, to the extent of some 10s. a quarter on its consumption of grain in all years of scarcity, to countervail the inertness or ignorance of the proprietors of heavy land, and their tenants.

That the landed interest, and the agriculturists at

large have been bestirring themselves ever since the low prices of 1834 and 1835, and especially since the investigation of 1836, must be plain to the most careless observer of passing events, and the progress which has been made in the diffusion of agricultural knowledge, during the last five years, is remarkable. In 1838, the English Agricultural Society (since dubbed Royal) was founded under the auspices of Lord Spencer and other great landholders, who had been distinguished for their devotion to practical agriculture; and which, taking for its motto "Practice with science," has been eminently successful in forming a medium for the communication of the best existing practices in husbandry. The society now numbers upwards of 5,000 members, into whose hands the journal published half yearly goes as of right, and which is besides sold to the public in the ordinary way. As the Highland Society of Scotland, at the beginning of the present century, was at once the evidence of improving husbandry, and the cause of its rapid diffusion in that country, so the formation of the English Society marks an epoch in the progress of agriculture in South Britain; and by its annual meetings and its journal will do much to place a knowledge of some of the best processes of agriculture within the reach of all English farmers. I refer, however, to this society chiefly for the purpose of showing, that the evidence given in 1836 has not been altogether lost upon British agriculturists. They are evidently setting their houses in order for a free trade in corn; a measure, which after the tariff and corn law of 1842, can only be delayed a comparatively short time. Nor has British agriculture ought to fear from foreign competition, which will merely have the effect of compelling the general adoption of the best

practices of the best cultivated districts; with such local or temporary variations, as the situation or season may suggest to farmers sharpened by self-interest and a wholesome knowledge, that upon themselves only, and not upon protecting duties, they must rely for profit.

The farmers may be assured that those who advise such self-reliance are their true friends; and the landed interest, generally, will soon discover, that the counsellors who teach them to rest upon protecting laws for prosperity are both unwise and unsafe advisers. There is no man of common observation, whatever his wishes or opinions upon the subject may be, who can hope to retain that modified—apparently modified, but practically stringent—monopoly given by Sir Robert Peel's late corn law, through another series of failing harvests. Yet so long as any corn law lasts, there will be none of that permanent adjustment of rents and other money payments, which is absolutely necessary to the progressive improvement of agriculture, and to its profitable pursuit; while the attention of all parties interested in land will be directed too exclusively to wheat growing, and the injurious incitement to plant wheat, in land not sufficiently prepared for that crop now offered by prices occasionally high, will continue. When gambling speculations upon mere price shall no longer form one of the elements in letting and hiring farms, and successful farming shall be universally understood to consist in such a system and such rotations as will return the largest produce for a given outlay,—when farmers, sufficiently calculating for the difference of seasons, shall be willing to embark in large expenditures with a view to distant returns,—when that steadiness and wholesome feeling, which induce tenants to desire and land-

lords to grant leases, shall return, then, and not till then, can the landed proprietor be assured, that the value of his property will advance in a ratio proportioned to national prosperity.

That agriculture can be permanently prosperous whilst the national resources are declining, forms an anomaly too preposterous to be worth discussing; and the landed interest would soon find, if our trading and manufacturing industry should decay, how little corn laws and restrictive legislation have promoted that wealth for which the British landholder is so remarkable. And the fact, that the nation was able to make great advances in wealth during the war and to pay a tax of enormous amount to the landholders besides,—a tax which was over and above their full share of the general prosperity,—is no argument for the maintenance of the exaction under a new state of circumstances. The manufactures of Great Britain were then first occupying new ground,—on the fresh vegetable soil of the world so to speak,—and the rate of profit, which the competition of accumulated capitals within a *limited and decreasing* field has now so much reduced, then enabled the trade of the nation to bear the burthen of the war, and *of the high price of food as well*; but that is hopeless now. Rivals meet our manufacturers in every foreign market, and tariffs and prohibitions (reflected images of our own corn laws) year by year exclude us from markets of great demand, and the commercial interests of the nation daily find that nothing but the indefatigable exertion of intelligence, caution, and active enterprise can enable them to maintain their footing. Is it likely, then, supposing the corn monopoly of the British landlords to have been

as real and beneficial, as it has been shown to be illusory and detrimental, to the agricultural interest, that the labour and commercial industry of the kingdom will consent to be taxed and restricted for the single purpose of exempting the occupiers of land from the necessity of exerting an intelligent activity other classes have found so indispensable to themselves? And this is not a question which will bear to be bandied about and made the subject of party warfare: it can never be permitted that party politicians shall fight over the comparatively insignificant point of whether there shall be an 8s. fixed duty, or a scale of duties, sliding from 20s. downwards, and that, in the meantime, the substantial evil *a protecting duty* shall be retained.

Both are equally mischievous; or if by ingenious hypothetical reasoning it can be shown that a trifling amount of evil less occurs under the one than in the other, the practical difference is so slight as not to be worth notice; for both extend the range of fluctuation, both effectually prohibit importation until the danger of a deficiency in this country became imminent; both would keep up that inducement to the misdirection of agricultural capital and industry, which has been so fully shown to be one of the great evils of the corn law; and neither could prevent, as the conjoint effect of that misdirection and of good seasons, such occasional gluts of wheat as at times to depress the British markets unnaturally. And there must be an *immediate* as well as a total repeal of all corn duties, if British agriculture is to be prosperous; for so long as the notion of protection lingers in the minds of farmers and landlords, that steady Anglo-Saxon determination, which has enabled Englishmen, in all other occupations, to accomplish so

much, will never be directed towards those improvements in husbandry, which are now so indispensable to agricultural success. I believe, from my own observation, no less than the evidence of 1836, that the agriculturists were then ripe for a free trade in corn, and that had the corn laws been repealed at that time, the condition of farmers at this moment would have been far better than it now is. That opportunity, however, was lost, and the agriculturists will probably undergo a fresh series of fluctuations before they get upon the safe ground of freedom. We must fully calculate that a period of agricultural distress is at hand; I know that farmers are looking to abatements of rent at the coming half year's audits; and should the summer season prove as fine and genial as the seed time and winter have been seasonable, prices will unquestionably be very low, and there will be much distress amongst that class of farmers, who have not ceased to found their hopes of profit on scarcity and high prices.

Now, then, is the time to repeal the corn law. Home competition has reduced the price of grain to a moderate rate, and if we are blessed with a good harvest, wheat may, and probably will, fall lower than it was in 1835. The most sensitive agricultural alarmist will, therefore, be unable to conjure up any phantom of greater abundance than that produced by the home growth. The repeal of the corn law would now create no panic, and free trade, by a gentle and gradual pressure, would direct the exertions of farmers towards that intelligent system of husbandry wherein their permanent prosperity is alone to be found. All the beneficial effects, which free trade in corn is fitted to produce on commerce and manufactures, would at once

begin to operate, and a clearer prospect of national prosperity, a prospect more free from adventitious circumstances whether of good or evil, will be opened, than has ever been hitherto attained. On the other hand, if, either through public indifference, or from the half measures of party politicians, the corn laws be allowed to linger on the statute book—practically inoperative, as we have seen, to prevent agricultural distress in abundant years—until the cycle of the seasons shall bring round two or three deficient crops, it is certain, that a total and instant repeal will be quickly forced upon the government of that day. But this will not be effected until all the evils of scarcity have again been endured by the community, new engagements at high rents entered into by farmers, wheat culture again unduly extended, monetary derangements and ruinous corn speculations once more rife, and, finally, an agricultural panic which the experience of several years may be required to allay. It is plain there never was a time, especially as regards the interests of the agriculturists, more favourable for the decisive step than the present. What do we fear? Is it cheap corn? If so, we have it notwithstanding the corn laws. But the mischief is, that though for this year we may have abundance, a bad harvest must half starve us before we can get relief.

That the British agriculturist is by no means so ill prepared to adopt the only stable means of success, as some of his self-styled friends would have believed, a brief survey of the present state of English husbandry will make manifest. Perhaps, there is no source from which I could take a statement of the actual condition of English agriculturists (for in Scotland farmers have become pretty well alive to the exigences of the

times) so little open to suspicion or cavil, as the article by Mr. Philip Pusey, M.P., one of the members for the agricultural county of Berks, "On the Progress of Agricultural Knowledge during the last four years," which appears in the last number of the English Agricultural Society's Journal, published in January of the present year. The purpose of the article is to inquire what has been the progress of agriculture since the establishment of the Society; and, incidentally, how far the working of the Society has assisted in promoting agricultural knowledge; and it completely confirms the views I have taken of the comparatively backward condition of the heavy soils, and the steady progress of agriculture in general. Mr. Pusey justly remarks, that the foundation of all improvement upon wet lands is drainage; and in the foregoing pages I have shown that the owners and occupiers of wet and heavy soils are those who are most frequent and loud in their demands for protection. "It is only seven years since," proceeds the article, "we heard in England, chiefly through the present Speaker of the House of Commons, that a manufacturer in Scotland, now well known as Mr. Smith, of Deanston, had found the means of making all land, however wet and poor it might be, warm sound, and fertile; and that this change was brought about by two processes, thorough draining and subsoil ploughing. His rule of draining was this, that we are not merely to endeavour to find out hidden springs, and to cut them through by a single drain, which in some of our books appeared to be regarded as all that was necessary; but that, as the whole surface of retentive soils is rendered wet, not by accidental springs, but by the rain, the whole surface of the field must be made

“thoroughly dry by under drains running throughout
 “at equal distances; any field, however wet, might be
 “so dried, provided these under drains were cut sufficiently dry.”

The soil having been thus rendered dry, the subsoil is stirred by a plough, which is simply the frame of a plough without the mouldboard, following in the furrow made by the ordinary method of ploughing; the effect of which is to admit the air, light, and water to the previously impervious subsoil, and so to change and ameliorate its character, that portions of it may be afterwards fully brought to the surface by deep ploughings, while the roots of plants can run into it and the water penetrate through it to the drains.

Probably there are few persons who have not, within the last few years, read more or less of this grand agricultural discovery, for such in truth it is, but only those who have had some experience of the difficulty with which clay-land is worked will entirely apprehend its value. Such land, when thus ameliorated, can be ploughed with fewer horses; in many districts the team may be reduced from *four* (I saw *five* in one plough-team the other day in Buckinghamshire) to *two*: it can be worked in weather which was before quite impracticable; and the crops are not only positively more abundant, but are far less dependent upon seasons, while they invariably ripen earlier, always a point of importance on deep land. The general adoption of this plan upon strong lands which are fitted for it—for it appears to have done harm on some land of a peculiar kind—will probably have as great an effect in increasing the productiveness of the clay lands of the country, as the turnip husbandry on the light soils had on land of that kind in the beginning of the present century. But

there is a circumstance which would seem to render its general adoption impossible, notwithstanding the exhortations of landholders and the ablest disquisitions upon the subject, which is the expense. On the soils which most require draining the cost of that process alone, if done with tiles, is from 10*l.* to 12*l.* and 15*l.* the acre; an outlay which it is merely fanciful to suppose will be incurred by the tenant while the fluctuations of price caused by the corn laws continue to render the farming heavy land a hazardous speculation, and the yearly value of such land scarcely a subject for calculation: and it may be safely predicted that the universal adoption of this great agricultural improvement will only be coincident with free trade in corn.

It is notorious that the manuring of land alone will not increase its productiveness beyond a certain point, and that being reached, additional manure does harm, but when strong deep land has been drained and subsoiled, so that any extra quantity of the under soil, which may be required, can be safely brought to the surface, the extent to which manures may be applied, may, for practical purposes, be deemed boundless. Neither is manure upon wet land of much use. For instance, on my own farm, the previous holder of which, though an indifferent farmer in other respects, always applied a great deal of stable manure from London, but was especially negligent in draining and carrying off the surface water, I found on ploughing up a rather wet piece of land, that the straw of the dung put in two years ago remained not at all decomposed, but turned up like a thin coating of old thatch: and this is more or less the case in all wet strong land.

Valuable as Mr. Smith's system promises to be, it forms a curious illustration of the observation made in

the Journal article, that “if the best practice of each different district could become general in the country, a very great improvement in farming would be at once effected;” for it is now ascertained, that this very system of frequent draining was practised in Suffolk forty years ago, and has long been, and is now common in Essex, where its value is well understood. The Essex draining, however, being done with straw and bushes only, is not so permanent as that with tiles proposed by Mr. Smith, requiring to be renewed in about fourteen or sixteen years; neither are the drains made so deep, nor filled up in such a manner as to admit of subsoil ploughing, which is at least as important to increased fertility as draining itself. Though, at present, the chief expectation of benefits to be derived from draining rests upon the inducements it holds out to enterprising tenants, there are sufficient examples of the great advantages landlords may derive from outlays in draining and irrigation, on a scale much more extensive than can ever be undertaken by a tenant under any farming lease. Thus the accounts given in the English Agricultural Society’s Journal of Sir James Graham’s draining operations at Netherby, Cumberland, and Lord Hatherton’s at Teddesley, in Staffordshire, where, in the latter instance, at an expense of about 1500*l.*, a tract of land was raised from the yearly value of 10*s.* to 30*s.* an acre, while the water from the under-ground drains, being thrown over a water-wheel, turned a threshing-machine and did other work in the barn*. The particulars of the great additional value caused by an

* Second volume of the Journal of the Agricultural Society of England, 277.

extensive and scientific plan of irrigation to the Duke of Portland's meadows, at Clipstone Park, Notts, are also detailed in the same work *. Yet there are various indications abroad, that, when once the attention of the landed proprietors shall have been turned to the subject, and when extensive and combined plans for carrying off the redundant moisture of the heavy soils, and for applying the accumulated waters to various uses, shall have developed the enormous latent value of their possessions, rapid and hitherto unimagined improvements will be made throughout the low land districts of England. The act of Parliament enabling owners of entailed estates to charge them with money borrowed for the purpose of draining, the numerous scientific publications on land-draining which have been published within the last few years, the notice Mr. Smith's (of Deanston) practice has attracted, and some proposals which have been put forth for a land-drainage company, all show that the landed interests only require to be relieved from their fallacious reliance on the corn laws, and all those illusory expectations of gain from protecting duties, in order to seek, by means of the healthy development of their own resources, that steady prosperity they have failed to secure by anti-commercial restrictions †.

* First volume, *ibid*, art. 39.

† Another purpose to which landowners may profitably apply wet clay land of an inferior kind, now generally of little value, is planting. Such lands are often peculiarly adapted for the growth of certain kinds of valuable timber, as oak, and, I believe, larch thrives well upon them. Some of the most unmanageable tracts of land in the country are those which are called *wealds*—Saxonice woods—and forests, and it is more than probable that there is no way in which the worst portions of such districts could be rendered so valuable, both to their owners and the public, as by planting them.

Before quitting this subject, I must quote an observation of Mr. Pusey's, which also supports the views I have disclosed in these pages. After enumerating many of the disadvantages of wet clay land, he says, "If I were a working-farmer, nothing would induce me to enter on a cold, wet farm, unless there were a fair prospect of its being drained, either with *my own money under a long lease*, or with the aid of the landlord." But what farmer, who intends to remain solvent and independent five years hence, would now

There is in North Wilts an extensive district of cold, wet, and most unproductive clay land, called Braydon Forest, which formerly belonged to the crown, but is now the property of Mr. Joseph Neeld, M.P. This land was broken during the war, and proving most unprofitable in tillage, was chiefly laid down again somewhere about 1821. Up to the year 1826, when the late Earl of Clarendon, who held the property under a crown lease, disposed of it to Mr. Neeld, I was well acquainted with this tract; and, believing that it might furnish an illustration of the pernicious effect of that indiscriminate conversion of all kinds of soils into tillage, which occurred about 1811 and 1812, I applied to Mr. Joseph Neeld, M.P., the proprietor's brother, for information as to the present state of the property. That gentleman was then absent from England, and it was not until after these sheets had passed through the press that I received from him a letter, in which he obligingly referred me to the local manager for the full information I had sought. It was too late to obtain that information for the purposes of this tract; but I must transcribe Mr. Neeld's account of the successful planting of a small part of the property: he says, "The property of my brother, at Braydon, remains much in the same state of cultivation as in Lord Clarendon's time, that is to say, where no plantations have been made. My brother has converted 400 acres into plantations, which have thriven wonderfully, and are much admired. The soil is a wet clay, and it is surprising how the plantations have succeeded." There is no doubt that the value of plantations has been too much overlooked by English landed proprietors, and I think this, like other omissions and misdirections of rural industry, may be distinctly traced to the inordinate desire to grow wheat which is promoted by the corn laws.

venture to take a long lease of "a cold wet farm," knowing, as he does, that he would be obliged to engage to pay a rent calculated on prices he may not obtain five years out of twenty? And while such lands can be let without draining, the landlords—the majority of whom cannot afford the outlay—will never, to any great extent, furnish the means. Here and there individual landholders may promote such improvements at their own expense; but, looking at land in the aggregate, its permanent improvement will only take place in the hands of occupiers. To enable the occupiers of the clay lands of England to become improvers, the first requisite plainly is steadiness of price, which can only result from a free trade in corn.

The breaking up *weak* pasture land is mentioned as an improvement which might be extended throughout England with advantage to owners and occupiers, and in that observation I quite concur; but that indiscriminate conversion of our better pasture lands to arable tillage, which it is now rather the fashion to recommend, must be resorted to with much caution; and the landlord should be very certain as to the means and the skill of his tenant before he permits such a conversion. There are many farmers of the present day, who will pay a fair rent and make a living upon pasture land, but who have neither skill nor capital to manage the very same farm under a convertible system. The superior quality too of both butter and cheese, which is made from old pasture land, is notorious. Besides, the system of cropping upon all land of such quality as is permanent pasture of much value, is in England far too scourging, and it would be well to eradicate from the minds of the majority of farmers, that anxiety for growing grain which so

often defeats its own object: this will never be effected so long as any corn laws, which offer a premium upon corn culture, shall be in existence.

Passing, then, from the heavy soils, the article enumerates improvements made in various districts on those of an opposite kind, light land and lands too loose. Thus marle, chalk, and clay have been extensively applied to sandy soils in Bedfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Hampshire, and, above all, in the fen districts of Lincolnshire, where the application of marle, or clay, has enabled good wheat to be grown, where formerly nothing but light oats could be raised. Chalk is also largely applied to clay land, and with excellent results. The means of fertilizing soils by amalgamation have long been practised in certain districts, whilst in others, equally well situated for such improvements, they seem to be entirely unknown.

To the Society belongs the merit of having shown, by actual experiment, that the wheel-plough*, though of much greater weight than the swing-plough, is considerably lighter in draught to the cattle, and does much better work, though the contrary had been for many years the received opinion. It was also proved that, great as the Scotch are in husbandry, their ploughs were the *most* severe implements to the cattle. The difference in favour of wheel-ploughs was found to be

* I had always taken it for granted that the swing-plough was the most approved implement, and used it exclusively, until I read an account of the experiments of the Society. My ploughman, a Suffolk man, always accustomed to a swing-plough, was induced, not without considerable difficulty, to use a wheel-plough; but having once used it, he finds it so much easier for his horses, and, in other respects, such a decided improvement, that he has become a complete convert to wheel-ploughs.

as one horse in three. Lord Spencer is said to have made the observations which led to the experiments upon this subject.

Here we have a fact established, which is of great importance to husbandry, as saving horse labour, generally a source of unnecessary expenditure on English farms. The same experiments have also established another position of some value, namely, that where horses plough at the pace of $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles an hour, the draught is no greater than when going at the pace of $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles in an hour, though, in the former case, nearly twice the quantity of earth was moved, and almost double the work done.

Again, an Oxfordshire agriculturist, Mr. Hannam, is recorded to have reduced the number of horses on a farm of three hundred and seventy acres from *sixteen* to *eight*, simply by the use of two-horse ploughs and single-horse carts. Independently of the annual saving in horse-keep, the economy of capital effected by these means is very considerable. Thus, on such a farm as Mr. Hannam's, besides the first cost of eight horses, which cannot be reckoned less than 20*l.* each, or 160*l.*, the ordinary description of carts and waggons used in the neighbourhood would cost 295*l.*, while the prime cost of the carts would be 128*l.* only, making a total saving upon entering a moderate-sized farm, on these two items of investment alone, of no less than 327*l.* All this shows what may be done in reducing farming outlay without lessening production, when the necessity for observation and intelligent calculation in agricultural matters shall have become obvious to the mass of farmers.

But, perhaps, it is in the raising green and root crops that English farmers have most to learn from the

diffused knowledge of the best practices of the most improved districts. In the north, a crop of roots is raised on ridges by the application of artificial manures, at an expense of from 12*l.* to 15*l.* an acre, whilst, in the south, a crop of swedes will be raised at a less charge than 2*l.* per acre for manure. By the former system, 25 and 30 tons of swedes, and upwards, are grown to the acre, while, by the latter, 15 tons is considered a large produce. Not only are the after-taken corn crops of the rotation greatly benefited by the heavy dressings given in the north to the root crops, but the increased quantity of cattle provender thereby raised, goes to the production of a force of manure double that obtained in the south from the same quantity of land.

There is no expenditure which the ordinary classes of English farmers seem to grudge more than that applied in raising roots, especially upon land where grain crops can be frequently grown, such as strong clays, yet there is none that would ultimately repay them better. The too frequent recurrence of turnips, in the four-course system of the lighter soils, has also caused that crop to be a very uncertain one; and, in the article I have noticed, a more extended use of mangold-wurzel and the cultivation of the white or Belgian carrot are recommended to vary the monotony of that rotation.

As good farming is now generally admitted to depend upon the quantity of stock which can be kept all the year round, it may be well to show, by the evidence of Mr. Pusey, the progress which has been made in providing for them through the winter.

“Such is the information received on those roots by which our

stock are sustained in winter; and I cannot but look back to the former history of farming on this point. The castles of the old barons were victualled at Michaelmas with salt beeves and sheep, because there was little hay for their winter keep. Afterwards more hay was made, and fresh meat was obtained throughout the year. When our population exceeded the extent of our meadows, the common turnip was introduced, but as this does not well resist the frost, it would last only till February. Then came the swede, which carries on till the end of March. Another class of summer food, clover, had been also introduced, but would not be ready so soon; vetches, therefore, were sown in autumn, to be fed off in spring. But there is still an interval to be filled, for vetches do not come in as soon as swedes are ended. Mangold-wurzel, indeed, will carry us through this space of time; but it appears also, that while winter feed may be prolonged, spring feed may be hastened by growing an early variety of vetches; and Mr. Williams, a farmer of Ilsley, informs us, that last year he had vetches three feet high, in the beginning of May, on a backward soil in a high situation."

The circle of artificial food is thus completed throughout the year.

In the department of live stock the improvement which has taken place within the last few years is surprising. Cattle and sheep have been so well bred, and kept so well from the hour of their birth, that a steer or a sheep is now often brought to market, well fattened, at two years old, whereas formerly four, five, and six years old beef and mutton were alone eaten. This material and beneficial change has been effected by the use of oil-cake, corn, and roots in feeding, and care and judgment in breeding all descriptions of stock. The value of well-bred stock, which is far beyond what the mere difference in weight would indicate, arises chiefly from this quality of early maturity. The gradual introduction of the improved breed of short-horn cows into all the best dairy districts of England is going on, and the benefits derived

therefrom are forcing even the most bigoted farmers to adopt the better breeds*.

The interest excited amongst the higher classes of agriculturists by the scientific investigations of Liebig and others, into the nature and chemical operation of manures and the analysis of soils, if of less immediate and practical utility, bespeaks a higher standard of mental cultivation amongst agriculturists than existed at any previous time, and will eventually lead, to those close examinations of the various processes and accurate records of facts in husbandry, which are requisite to give it the character of a science.

Now, though individual cultivators had been, for some time, in the practice of enlightened systems of husbandry, and were thereby enabled to bear up against the ruinous fluctuations caused by the corn laws; yet it was not until that complete disclosure of the real origin of agricultural distress, and of the hollowness of all expectations of profit founded on protective laws, which were made in 1836, that any general movement was communicated to agriculture. Then a desire for improvement, to counteract the effects of low prices, arose amongst the landed gentry; one of the consequences of which was the formation

* Meeting, the other day, a friend much employed in the west of England as a land-agent, and talking with him on the progress of agriculture in his district, he gave me many illustrations of the activity with which farmers there were improving their systems; amongst the rest, he said, "You know J. W. (a dairy farmer notorious for his adherence to "ancient ways"), well, he has become alive to the necessity of improved stock, and has lately given 85*l.* for four short-horn cows." To those who know the class of farmers here alluded to, this fact speaks volumes.

of the English Society, whose proceedings have both given an impulse to improvement, and diffused the knowledge of useful practices already in operation. "I am certain," says Mr. Pusey, "that four year's ago no one knew how much good farming there was in the country;" and he adds, "now that these things are come to light, we may hope that they will not only be spoken of, but be practised more generally; that draining tiles will be greatly cheapened, more drains be cut, more chalk be laid on the downs, the wolds, and the clays; marle on the sand, clay on the fens and heaths, lime on the moors, many of which should be broken up; that old ploughs will be cast away, the number of horses reduced, good breeds of cattle extended, stock fattened where it has hitherto been starved; root crops drilled and better dunged, new kinds of those crops cultivated, and artificial manures of ascertained usefulness purchased."

In all this, every one must cordially agree, as well as in the following sentiments — "It is the knowledge of these weapons, *which we have actually in our hands*, that may make us look back with satisfaction to the efforts we have already made, and *forward with cheerful confidence to the improvement of husbandry, through the collective experience of our farmers.*" But there is one obstacle to the healthy self-reliance from which alone these improvements can spring. On this self-reliance only can agricultural prosperity be based, and though such reliance, and improved husbandry its consequence, may extend amongst the more educated of the agriculturists, the general adoption of the means of success pointed at in the above quotations, will never take place amongst the

more numerous and less intelligent body of English farmers, until all those fallacious hopes and erroneous calculations, the offspring of the corn laws, shall have ceased to misdirect their attention.

One word upon leases : — In the article above quoted, Mr. Pusey has more than once alluded to the necessity of leases of considerable duration wherever large outlays by tenants are anticipated, and this very obvious preliminary to all permanent improvement upon a large scale, has been much dwelt on by all who have lately written or spoken upon husbandry. But for the last twenty years tenants have been, at least, as unwilling to take, as landlords to grant leases ; the one class fearing to pledge themselves to high rents on the faith of protection prices, the other hoping, by means of their corn law, to avoid any permanent reduction of rents. Political considerations also have been said, and I believe truly, to have had much to do with the landowners' indisposition to grant leases ; but the maintenance of the corn law has been the grand object for which the landowners have desired to exercise political influence over the tenantry : and notwithstanding the advocates of protection have, of late, been fond of putting forward the farmers' interest as a plea for the corn laws, they have most of them entertained a shrewd suspicion, that the farmers, sooner or later, would arrive at the conclusion, that all the losses of fluctuating prices and artificially high rents may be traced to the corn laws. Hence, the check political has been so constantly held over the farmers. My own opinion, however, is, that this motive for refusing leases has been over-estimated. But, whatever may be the cause or combination of causes, the disuse of leases is notorious, and forms a se-

rious drawback to agricultural improvement; yet to expect that they will again become general, whilst a corn law and its consequences, fluctuating prices exist, is to suppose that cultivators have learned nothing from the trials and hazards of the last twenty-five years. And, perhaps, until the period of transition has passed away, this is not to be regretted. The leases most usual were barbarous and cumbrous instruments, utterly unsuited to the present state of agricultural knowledge. Though often impeding and obstructing improvements by the tenant, I have never known them sufficient to protect the land against over-cropping, and consequent deterioration, in the hands of an indifferent or over-rented tenant. Then, the terms common in England, of seven, ten, twelve, or fourteen years, are too short to give that permanent interest to the tenant which is the corner-stone of all improvements in husbandry. So clearly is this now understood, that we may be sure, whenever the agricultural interest shall be freed from the incubus of a "protecting" duty on foreign grain, leases will again be resorted to with equal readiness by both farmer and landlord. Then it will be advisable, as indeed it is now whenever a lease is made, to consider with how little of restriction and positive stipulation as to the mode of culture, the landlord may protect his land against unfair treatment. With the exception of a few simple, general provisions, adapted to the locality and nature of the farm, I believe all that will be necessary is, for the tenant to be interdicted from growing in the last three years of the term more than the proper proportions of exhausting crops, and from misapplying his manure. Except at the end of the term, no tenant can injure his farm without

damaging himself ; and, if ordinary care is exercised in first letting the farm, a landowner may safely trust to his tenant's self-interest to keep the land in good condition, provided he be not stimulated to any particular mode of mismanagement by legislative enactment. It is also worthy of consideration, whether it might not materially promote the interest of both parties to adopt leases of very considerable duration, as thirty, forty, or even fifty years, with certain periodical, say decennial, advances of rent ; which would, not only, give the landowner his fair share of the increase in the productive power of their common property, but would act as an incentive to the tenant to prepare himself to meet the definite and pre-arranged advances of rent by increased production. I have no doubt, that in this way a very great additional value may be given to land in every part of the kingdom, for a leaseholder at rack-rent for a very long term, has, for most of the purposes of practical enjoyment, all the fixity of possession of a freeholder ; and, it is certain, land is never so productively employed as when the occupier has a full, but fair, yearly rent to pay.

CONCLUSION.

FROM the foregoing examination, founded almost exclusively upon facts and data furnished by persons practically versed, and directly interested in agriculture and the corn trade, the following conclusions seem to be irresistible :

That the chief part of that permanent improvement in agriculture and of that rise of rents, which has occurred in modern times, commenced with, and has been consequent upon, the growth of commercial and manufacturing industry in this country, and that such benefits to the landowner are solely based upon the national prosperity thereby occasioned ; while the exorbitant prices to which grain attained during the war were completely fortuitous, and were mainly caused by deficient seasons, concurring with extraordinary obstructions to foreign supplies, which arose out of the particular events of the contest.

That the most complete monopoly of the home market will not secure permanently high prices to the British agriculturist ; but, on the contrary, that the occasionally high range of prices, which, under such a monopoly, a deficient season produces, has a tendency to force an undue and unnatural extension of wheat tillage, and thereby to depress the price of bread-corn, in years of abundance, to an extent that would never occur under a free trade in corn.

That the monopoly prices promised by the corn laws, both of 1815 and 1828, were never practically enjoyed, for any considerable period, by the occupiers of land in Great Britain, whilst all their fixed money engagements have been calculated with reference to the promised, not to the real prices of grain; and besides, that the community will not bear, in times of scarcity, an effective maintenance of the corn monopoly, for a period sufficiently long to compensate the farmer for the unnatural depression prices undergo in years of abundance. This was clearly shown in the admission of foreign grain, by the Government, in 1825, 1826, and 1827; in the remodelling of the corn law in 1828; and in the recent change in the corn law in 1842, all of which, though insufficient to meet the necessities of the respective occasions, were evidences, that no stringent corn law will be submitted to by the nation when under the pressure of even a partial deficiency.

That though the full extent of monopoly prices successively promised by law, would not be endured by the public for any considerable time, yet the restrictive operation of the corn laws has been stringent enough to cause great advances and violent fluctuations of price, which have proved most injurious to the consumer, and destructive of all rational calculation in the business of the farmer.

That though the farmer, who by accident had taken his farm during a low range of prices, if his rent had been fixed with reference to the then existing prices, might be apparently benefited by even a short period of high prices; yet that, in fact, he is no gainer, for the competition of farmers for farms en-

ables landlords and land-agents, in practice, to disregard the very low priced years, and to calculate money-rents with reference to the prices of seasons of comparative scarcity, and to the act of Parliament price of corn.

That the variation in the productiveness of the crops of this country, in different seasons, is so great, that, while in deficient, and perhaps in average years, a certain amount of foreign supply is required to prevent the evils of dearth, the home crops, in abundant seasons, have been so productive as to reduce the prices of grain in this country, to, at least, the level of the European market.

That the shifting duties of the existing system of corn laws have caused large accumulations of foreign grain,—often beyond the effective demand of consumers,—to be suddenly thrown upon the British market, at periods most detrimental to the British grower, and which, under an open trade, would have come in gradually, and would have been absorbed in consumption, with the effect of keeping prices steady and equable.

That the corn laws have prevented timely adjustments of rent, and have thereby permanently injured the landlord and tenant, more particularly on those soils which were formerly almost exclusively regarded as “wheat-lands;” that they have induced farmers to rely for profit upon a great breadth of wheat, to the neglect of stock-farming and improved systems of husbandry; and that they have created a habit, in the minds of those connected with land, of looking to the legislature for some undefined or unattainable remedy for occasional distress, rather than to their own energy and enterprise.

That the uncontrolled power, which the landed interests have had to legislate for the protection of agriculture, has not abled them to prevent the periodical recurrence of real and severe distress amongst the tenantry; but that, on the contrary, protection has either caused or aggravated agricultural distress, by interfering with the manner in which capital and industry would otherwise have been applied to land.

That it is not for the interest of the farmer that prices of corn should be high, for whether they are high or low, the existing competition for farms would prevent him from realising more than the ordinary rate of profit, after payment of rent and other outgoings, calculated according to the actually existing prices; but it is most important to him that prices should be steady, without fluctuation beyond what must follow from variations in the seasons; and that such steady prices would be best secured by a constant and regular importation of grain.

That all recent improvements in agriculture have taken place in spite of the corn laws, and by pursuing plans directly the reverse of those which the corn laws have tended to encourage; that the agriculturalists, who have had least reliance upon the corn laws, have been the most successful, and that the farmers, who have been most remarkable for their adherence to old systems of husbandry, or for want of capital or skill, have been the most apprehensive of free trade in corn.

That though the corn laws were avowedly passed to keep up rents, there are good reasons for believing that, if they had never existed, rents in Great Britain would have been as high, if not higher, than at present.

That a fixed duty on corn would, to a considerable extent, have the same effect in producing fluctuations of price, by misdirecting the application of agricultural industry and capital, as well as by aggravating the incidence of scarcity and increasing the depression of prices in years of abundance, as the sliding scale of duties; and would, when any foreign supply may be required, operate as a direct tax upon the whole of the corn consumed in this country, equivalent to the duty levied upon the portion imported.

That, under the most completely free trade in corn, the largest quantity of foreign grain that could be profitably imported would be so small, when compared with the total consumption of this country, that the utmost effect it could produce on the British market would be to prevent sudden variations in the price of corn, and exorbitantly high prices in deficient years; but that, in productive seasons, it is doubtful whether the inferior agriculture of the Continent could compete at all with that of Great Britain.

That by looking solely to a large acreable return for a given outlay, which is the direction in which science is leading agriculture, the British farmer would place his business upon a stable foundation, and be enabled to set all competition at defiance.

That the immediate repeal of the corn law is not only desirable, as the means of placing agriculture upon a sure foundation, by at once enforcing those improved systems of husbandry, and adjustments of engagements, which alone can make agriculture permanently prosperous; but that the present time, from the comparatively low prices and the healthy appear-

ance of the growing crops, is peculiarly favourable for the adoption of free trade in corn*.

And, finally, that the high value of land in this country has always been coincident with, and is directly attributable to, the great wealth created by our commercial and manufacturing industry, and the comparatively wide diffusion of that wealth amongst the mass of the community; but not to any artificial restrictions, which have been shackles and obstructions on, not aids to, our productive power.

* A very intelligent farmer, who has also been, for many years, largely engaged in the corn trade, in Essex and Hertfordshire, tells me, that there is now full *one-fifth* more land sown with wheat, than in any one year within his recollection. This is universally the case, and, with a moderately good harvest, will assuredly produce very low prices for some time to come.

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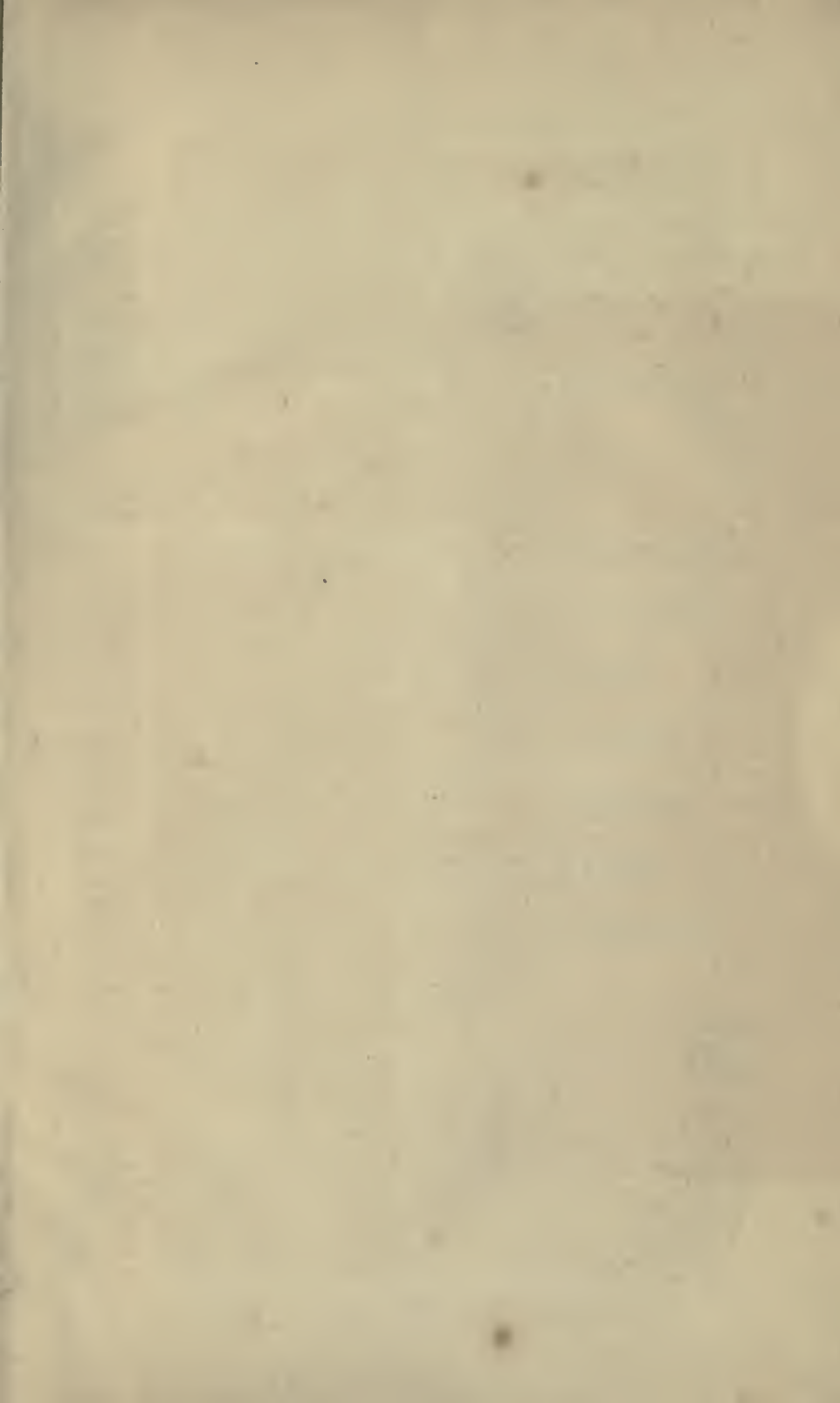
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